

**THIS SCAN IS
COURTSEY OF THE
LENNY SILVER
COLLECTION**

The New York Review of Science Fiction

Number Twenty-Six
October 1990
\$2.50

Samuel R. Delany The Life of/and Writing

"The Life of Writing" is a phrase we associate with the 18th Century writer, Dr. Samuel Johnson—responsible for compiling the first comprehensive English language dictionary. He also wrote a fantasy, *Rasselas*, that now and again appears from various contemporary paperback houses attempting to add some tone and history to their science fiction and fantasy lines.

When Dr. Johnson used the phrase, the life of writing, it meant, of course, the literary life—and referred to the kinds of things an 18th Century writer might be occupied with in the course of an 18th Century day, from sharpening goose quills and grinding inksstones to debating in coffee shops what historical world would or would not make successful subject matter for a profitable poetic tragedy, to negotiating with a bookseller (what the 18th Century had in place of publishers) as to what percent of the costs you might put up toward printing your *last* profitable poetic tragedy, as all publishing at the time was more or less vanity publishing—though most of your time, money, and energy might be reserved for putting out polemical pamphlets on any subject from the foggery and decadence of women, the nobility, or the young, to meditations on taxes, fashions, or God—for which opinions you risked fame, notoriety, or (sometimes) jail.

The life of writing has changed drastically in three hundred years.

But, as the phrase fades into the memory of literary antiquarians, it passes through a strangely luminous moment, when, as its historical meaning verges on the totally obsolete, suddenly it opens up into a host of other possible meanings, comic, surreal, suggestive: in 1970, the poet Judith Johnson Sherwin published a book of experimental short stories with Atheneum, *The Life of Riot*, the title of which clearly takes its resonances from Johnson. And it does not take much for us to read in the original phrase, *The Life of Writing*, the notion of what, in any piece of writing, makes that writing lively: the life (or liveliness) is writing. And if we look at life, not as referring to general liveliness but to the range of every day life, then, with only a little more catastrophe, we can read "the life of writing" as meaning the way every day life is reflected in writing. Thus, as we multiply and survey the possible—if-probably—interpretations we can unpack from this most unassuming phrase, finally we have to admit that, buried in its text, is pretty much every possible relationship that we can conceive as existing between "writing" and "life"—that is, "writing" in any of its meanings, and "life" in any of its.

In my title, then, I've tried to suggest that range and multiplicity by taking that weakest of English prepositions, "of," and placing behind it a slash, that like a skew mirror, reveals that what can be hidden in that loose and lax preposition is the strongest of English conjunctions, "and." Indeed, the "of" and the "and," in my title, on either side of the virgule, mirror each other, and, I hope, problematize our original phrase out into an infinitude of possible relations between world and text, word and world, action and articulation.

What are some of these relations?

Teaching at the Clarion SF Writers' Workshop on and off for twenty years now, I can certainly remember when some of the complexities of this relational complex were first brought home to me.

A young writer of seventeen or so had handed in a story—a story

(Continued on page 8)

In this issue

Samuel Delany reflects on Life, Art,
and all that

Ellen Weil reveals the secrets of Brian Aldiss's
non-genre fiction

Robert Killheffer explores *The Hollow Earth*

John Clute joins Terry Bisson on a trip to Mars

Richard Terra on a weird book by S.T. Joshi

*Plus more notes on Hyperion, impressions of the
small press, old favorites and new letters*

Ellen R. Weil The Secret You Fantasy and Story In Brian Aldiss's Mainstream Fiction

"Of course life tried to imitate art," writes Brian Aldiss in his 1988 novel *Forgotten Life*. "What else was there to imitate?" [130]. Almost as if in ironic illustration of Aldiss's point, Paul Fussell's 1989 study *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* comes very close to being the same book that Aldiss's fictional Oxford psychologist, Clement Winter, is trying to write in *Forgotten Life*. Winter's book is to be titled *Adaptability: Private Lives in Public Wars*, and like Fussell's study, its subject is the effects of war on the lives of individuals who participate in it. What further compounds the irony is that each book—Fussell's real one and Aldiss's imaginary one—uses examples from autobiographical writings about the "Forgotten Army" in the Burmese campaign during World War II. In Clement Winter's book, these writings are those of his dead brother Joseph; in Fussell's, they are the "Horatio Stubbs" novels of Brian Aldiss!

Forgotten Life describes how Clement is drawn further and further into his brother's life and wartime experiences as he tries to sort out Joseph's papers for possible publication. Much of the first half of the novel is given over to Joseph's stories of Burma and Sumatra, which closely resemble the experiences of Horatio Stubbs in the novels *A Soldier Erect* (1971) and *A Rude Awakening* (1978). Aldiss, writes Fussell, "is probably the most acute and comic registrar of wartime sexual deprivation and its effects" [110]. Fussell goes on to note that in these works of "fictional autobiography," "there is no reason to infer a very wide distance between Horatio Stubbs [the narrator] and his creator" [110].

Nor is there much reason to infer a very wide distance between Aldiss's Horatio Stubbs, and Joseph Winter in *Forgotten Life*—at least in terms of raw experience. Each suffered under a distant father and a neurotic mother who frequently threatened to abandon them. Each was sent away from home, first when their younger sister was born and later to attend a repressive Victorian-style boarding school. Each served in

(Continued on page 3)

JACK WOMACK



AN ENTIRELY ORIGINAL AMERICAN VOICE—WILLIAM GIBSON



the "Forgotten Army" and was stationed in Sumatra after the War. Each was to have been a part of "Operation Zipper," the planned seaborne invasion of Singapore, but each was saved from this hazardous duty by the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, leading to a distinctly ambivalent attitude toward nuclear weapons. In short, it is evident that in *Forgotten Life*, Aldiss has returned to much of the same autobiographical material he had touched upon in the earlier novels.

But *Forgotten Life* is a richer and more complex novel than any of the Horatio Stubbs series. New auto-biographical elements are introduced—such as what it is like to be a successful author of popular fiction—and more complex narrative techniques are used, such as the bold and sometimes risky insertion of lengthy passages from Joseph's writings. The style is more restrained, less headlong. Perhaps most important—at least for readers familiar with Aldiss's science fiction—is that the novel as a whole is informed by a sense of the fantastic, of how we construct the stories of our own lives, how we let such stories govern our lives, and how we find in fantasy both guilt and consolation.

I am using the term "fantasy" here in two senses, psychological and literary, and Aldiss invites both usages. While there is little direct fantastic invention in *Forgotten Life*—really only two episodes which might qualify as belonging to Todorov's narrow genre of the unresolved "fantastic"—there is much about how the varieties of fantastic expression can be used to encode concepts of the self. Specifically, Aldiss has much to say about how dreams, images from art, archetypes from Jungian psychology, and the reading and writing of fantastic literature can contribute to this process of self-definition. Throughout the novel, these images and texts seem to constitute a kind of "secret self" for the novel's characters. Given some of the painful real-life reminiscences that are woven into the text, and at the risk of playing too much with Freud, one cannot help but wonder how much of the secret Brian Aldiss is encoded as well.

There is more than the directly autobiographical material to support the notion that *Forgotten Life* represents a kind of spiritual manifesto for Aldiss. The basic theme of the book—two brothers who seem to represent radically opposed aspects of twentieth century life,

and yet who are unable to completely escape each other—was prefigured in a remarkably powerful novella published in 1977, the year before the final Horatio Stubbs novel appeared. *Brothers of the Head* is a bizarre but not quite fantastic story of Siamese twins, raised in a remote corner of England, who become hugely successful rock stars only to fade back into obscurity when their contract expires. Like Joseph Winter, the twin named Barry is passionate and often violent, while his sibling Tom is more restrained and thoughtful, and thinks of himself as "the normal one" (p. 67). Their tragedy, of course, is that they can never be spiritually united nor physically separated. David Wingrove, who regards this story as "the most perfect of Aldiss's novellas" (*Apostrophe*, p. 211), views the brothers as an allegory of the animal and spiritual nature of modern man, each side unable to achieve wholeness, both subject to exploitation by the machinery of commerce, both equally isolated from the "dreaming self" represented by an underdeveloped third head, resting on Barry's shoulder, which never achieves consciousness until near the end of the story. (The idea seems to have long fascinated Aldiss, who in his history of science fiction, *Trillion Year Spree*, spends an unusual amount of time commenting on the sleeping head of the two-headed mutant Mrs. Grales in Walter M. Miller, Jr.'s classic novel *A Canticle for Leibowitz*.) *Brothers of the Head* is, one hopes, far from autobiographical in the literal sense, but its themes of passion versus rumination, of huge popular success disguising private misery, of the desperate need to escape from a part of oneself that is needed for survival, make the tale into a kind of dream version of many of the issues that haunt the later novel.

Classifying any fiction as auto-biographical is always questionable, as we are reminded by novelist Jerzy Kosinski, who is himself often characterized as an auto-biographical novelist:

To say that any novel is auto-biographical may be convenient for classification, but it's not easily justified. What we remember lacks the hard edge of fact. To help us along we create little fictions, highly subtle and individual scenarios which clarify and shape our experience. The remembered event becomes an

The New York Review of Science Fiction

ISSUE #26 October 1990
Volume 3, No. 2

FEATURES

Samuel R. Delany: The Life of and Writing: 1

Ellen R. Weil: The Secret You: Fantasy and Story in Brian Aldiss's Mainstream Fiction: 1

Luke McGuff: Small Press Reviews: 13

More About Hyperion: A Note on Hyperion by Richard A. Russo

and The Fallout of Hyperion by Robert Killheffer: 14

Greg Cox: Excerpts from The Transylvanian Library: A Consumer's Guide to Vampire Fiction: 19

REVIEWS

Rudy Rucker's *The Hollow Earth* and Roger Zelazny's and Fred Saberhagen's

The Black Throne, reviewed by Robert Killheffer: 5

Terry Bisson's *Voyage to the Red Planet*, reviewed by John Clute: 7

Jack Womack's *Heathen*, reviewed by Victor Gonzalez: 16

Walls of Fear, edited by Kathryn Cramer, reviewed by Joan Gordon: 17

S. T. Joshi's *The Weird Tale*, reviewed by Richard Terra: 18

Robert Holdstock's *Lavondys*, reviewed by Cy Chauvin: 19

PLUS

Lagniappe by Joe Haldeman (p. 4), Larry Niven (p. 6), Isaac Asimov (p. 9), and Ben Bova (p. 10); a lettercolumn (p. 22); and an editorial (p. 24).

Kathryn Cramer, Features Editor; L. W. Currey, Contributing Editor; Samuel R. Delany, Contributing Editor; David G. Hartwell, Reviews Editor; Gordon Van Gelder, Managing Editor.

Staff: Greg Cox, Donald G. Keller, Robert Killheffer, John J. Ordover.

Published monthly by Dragon Press, P. O. Box 78, Pleasantville NY 10570.

\$2.50 per copy. Annual subscriptions: in U.S., \$24; \$28 Canada; \$32 First Class;

overseas, \$36 (via Air Printed Matter). For overseas air mail, please inquire. Domestic institutional subscriptions \$28.

Please make checks payable to Dragon Press, and payable in U.S. funds.

Copyright © 1990 Dragon Press.

incident, a highly compressed dramatic unit that mixes memory and emotion, a structure made to accommodate certain feelings. If it weren't for these structures, art would be too personal for the artist to create, much less for the audience to grasp (320).

The governing image of the first half of the novel—the image that gives this section its title, "Angel"—is taken from an illustrated edition of Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* which Joseph remembers from his childhood. Almost from infancy, Joseph has felt rejected and unloved by his mother, who compares him unfavorably to an angelic older sister who died at the age of six months, before Joseph was born. In the book, the child Joseph had found a picture which seemed to symbolize his fate:

One picture showed a small boy climbing a hill. Over his head—rather uncomfortably close, to my infant mind—floated a small girl angel, with only a shred of cloud to conceal her nudity. This menacing little phenomenon became my dead sister, hanging over me like the Sword of Damocles. The Angel of Damocles.

Nothing I did was ever as good as what my steel-engraving angel would have done. Nor could I in any fashion prove an adequate substitute for her [158].

This "steel-engraving angel" becomes for Joseph an image of his own lifelong inadequacy, his inability to sustain relationships with women, his disloyalty adventuring. Years later, at his mother's funeral, he visits the local council offices and, through old gravediggers' records, discovers that the older sister whose infant perfection has haunted him all his life was in fact stillborn—that she was, in the words of Clement, "a protective fantasy. Mother was editing her past in order to make it bearable" (207). As he says this, Clement looks at his own wife, Sheila, a bestselling fantasy author, who he knows has edited her own past in a similar way.

In an autobiographical essay published in 1985, Aldiss reveals the source of this episode in his own life:

Hardly had I learned to understand speech before I was aware that my arrival in the world profoundly disappointed my mother. She was still mourning the daughter who had died five years earlier. There was no room in her heart for a boy. "Your sister's with the angels." Avenging angels, I thought (17).

In 1984, at the funeral of his Aunt Dorothy, Aldiss, like Joseph, visited the council offices and found in old gravediggers' records that his older sister had been stillborn and, like Joseph's older sister, buried in un consecrated ground without a marker. Even the year, 1920, is the same. "Thus, in 1984," wrote Aldiss, "a ghost was laid which had haunted me for over half a century" (17). In *Forgotten Life*, Joseph says, "To know is like laying a ghost" (207).

Such ghosts populate *Forgotten Life* to a remarkable extent, though not all of them (one hopes) are Aldiss's own. Clement's wife Sheila has taken the pseudonym "Green Mouth" for her fiction, after a stuffed toy lizard given to her by her natural father, killed in World War I. For her fans, she has constructed a sunny "biography of the author" which disguises her own miserable childhood at the hands of a physically and sexually abusive stepfather. Her entire career as a writer, in fact, began as an escape from the agony of her daughter's death. Joseph is haunted not only by the false memory of a dead older sister, but by the memory of Mandy, a Chinese girl whom he inadvertently abandoned in Singapore after the war. Clement, of course, is haunted by Joseph himself, his own "steel-engraving angel," whose ghost actually appears to confront him in one of the novel's most aching scenes. Throughout this whole first section of the novel, vivid and often fantastic images from the past seem to overwhelm the daily lives of the characters. Aldiss seems to suggest that the inability to assimilate, order, or make sense of these images is finally what turns them into fantasy. It is as though the fantastic—Sheila's heroic fantasy novels, Clement's ghostly brother, Joseph's ailing child-angel—is made up of undigested or unbearable chunks of reality.

The second part of the novel is titled "Anima," and it, too, derives its governing image from one of Joseph's lifelong obsessions. Since childhood, Joseph has been troubled by a recurring dream in which he wanders in a "vast, disconsolate garden" (232), feeling vaguely threatened. He emerges in front of a flight of nine steps, leading up through a series of terraces to a wall with a perfectly circular entrance, beyond which is a blank white screen. Joseph feels an unexplainable joy when approaching the entrance, and sometimes is encouraged by female taurine figures, but the dream always ends before he can pass through the entrance. This George MacDonald-like dream—which also recalls the symbolic dreams of the twin brother Tom in *Brothers of the Head*—becomes part of Joseph's personal mythology, and he associates it with a tale read in childhood about a boy who lost his shadow (a fairly common fairy tale theme, versions of which appear in Adalbert von Chamisso's *Peter Schlemihl* and MacDonald's *Phantastes*). "Although I was already familiar with Grimm's fairy stories," writes Joseph, "this was the first story I every read that seemed to say to me direct, pointing a finger, 'This is about you—the real you—the secret you!'" (233).

Joseph's "shadow" turns out to be about as classically archetypal as it sounds. In the last few months of his life, he arrives at a new interpretation of his lifelong dream, based on a classic figure-field reversal. The circular doorway with the white screen behind it, he realizes, is in fact an image of the moon, which Joseph takes to represent his Jungian anima. "The dream had always made him happy," Joseph's girlfriend tells Clement, "because it represented an escape to another world, to a higher sphere" (264). On the night of a full moon, Joseph becomes convinced his anima will visit him, and indeed it does, bearing the message "Your mother did love you" (266). The message permits Joseph to arrive at some sense of peace and wholeness at the end of his life.

Clement realizes that Joseph has been able to finally make sense of his life by turning it into a kind of mythology, and that Clement's own project of trying to understand Joseph through his mass of papers and documents can never add up to anything without this mythology. "He was very much a man who lived with myths" (79), Clement muses at one point. Joseph's mythology—his governing story, put another way—appears startlingly close to Aldiss's own. It includes not only the phantom older sister and the discovery of the anima, but the landscape of death in Burma (where Aldiss also served, and which he wrote about in *A Soldier's Bush*), the lush vegetation and insect life of Sumatra (which shows up also in *A Rude Awakening* and, translated into science fiction

Joe Haldeman My Favorite Book of My Own

Right now my favorite book of my own is *The Hemingway House*. I like short books that do a lot of things. This one is an amusing little story with a small zoo of interesting characters that I think would even be an enjoyable read for people not especially interested in either science fiction or Hemingway, but a lot of fun for people who like one or the other or both.

It was a fascinating book to work on because the time and energies I would normally put into working out the scientific and engineering aspects of a novel went into literary detective work—analysis of Hemingway's early style so that I could do an accurate pastiche not of the polished, mannered later Hemingway, but of the early writer still struggling with mechanics. Delving into biographical minutiae was fascinating.

It's a double homage, both to Hemingway and to Heinlein—the freewheeling gonzo Heinlein of "All You Zombies"—and "The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag." It's my first obviously metafictional novel (*Mindbridge* was partly metafictional in intent, though few critics saw it that way) and also the first time I've deliberately constructed a plot whose resolution is ambiguous. It was fun to write.

terms, in *Hollowe*), the lost love of the Chinese girl Mandy (who appeared earlier as Margey in *A Rude Awakening*), the concubine of being saved by the atomic bombing of Hiroshima (mentioned earlier in connection with *A Rude Awakening* and Aldiss's auto-biographical essays), the Dickensian boarding school of his childhood (which appears briefly in *The Hand-Raised Boy* and recurrently in Aldiss's auto-biographical writings), even the fictional re-entrant poet of Joseph's boyhood village, "William Westlake" (who, like the poet William Cowper in Aldiss's real boyhood village, "went off his head, and died there" [137], and whose "The Crippled Goat" [195] sounds suspiciously like Cowper's "the stricken deer" from his poem "The Gardner"). To a great extent, Joseph's myth is Aldiss's own. Even the search for the anima seems prefigured, if one agrees with David Wingrove's insightful speculation, made in 1984, about what a fourth Horatio Stubbs novel would be like—"an incomplete half of the human equation searching for his female principle" (159). Certainly, this idea is also reflected in *Brothers of the Head*, in which the twins, raised without a mother, each find it impossible to find wholeness on their own terms.

Aldiss, Brian. "Brian W. Aldiss," in *Contemporary Authors: Autobiography Series*, ed. Adele Sarkissian. Detroit, MI: Gale Research Co., 1985, II, 15-32.
—. *Brothers of the Head*. London: Pierrot, 1977.
—. *Forgotten Life*. New York: Atheneum, 1989 [1988].
—. *The Hand-Raised Boy*. London: Corgi, 1971 [1970].
—. *Hollowe*. Norwalk, CT: Easton Press, 1987 [1962].
—. "Magic and Bare Boards," in *Hell's Cartographers*, ed. Brian W. Aldiss and Harry Harrison. New York: Harper, 1975, pp. 173-209.
—. *A Rude Awakening*. New York: Charter, 1980 [1978].
—. *Trillion Year Spree* (with David Wingrove). New York: Atheneum, 1986.
Booth, Wayne C. *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*. Berkeley:

Works Cited

University of California Press, 1988.
Fussell, Paul. *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989.
Griffin, Brian, and David Wingrove. *Apertures: A Study of the Writings of Brian Aldiss*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984.
Hynes, Samuel. "Reconstructing a Brother," review of *Forgotten Life*, *New York Times Book Review*, 30 April 1989, p. 10.
Kosinski, Jerzy. Interview in *Writers at Work*, Fifth Series, ed. by George Plimpton. New York: Penguin, 1981, pp. 313-338.
McNelly, Willis E. "Brian W. Aldiss," in *Twentieth Century Science Fiction Writers*, ed. E. F. Bleiler. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1982, pp. 251-258.
Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard. Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1975.

The Hollow Earth by Rudy Rucker
New York: William Morrow, 1990; \$18.95 hc; 308 pages

The Black Throne by Roger Zelazny and Fred Saberhagen
New York: Baen Books, 1990; \$4.95 pb; 278 pages
reviewed by Robert Killheffer

We find ourselves again in the Land of What Might Have Been, or What May Be, on the other side of the border between worlds. It is a place peopled with familiar figures from the past; the landscape is for the most part the one we know from high school history and our own experience. And about us we see the tracks of many another recent visitor: Robert Silverberg, for instance, with his *Time Gate* volumes (in which computer reconstructions of historical personalities—Socrates, Joan of Arc, Voltaire—meet and exchange views); Bruce Sterling, whose much-praised "Dori Bangs" weaves together two cut-short lives of the near past; George Alec Effinger, who brought his novella "Look Away" here for a Civil War setting; Tim Powers, who has roamed all over this terrain to bring us fantasy-laced visions of the pirated Caribbean and poet-filled Europe. Historical figures from Genghis Khan to Lee Harvey Oswald have been popping up with alarming regularity in recent sf stories and novels, and this season, books by Rudy Rucker and by the occasional team of Roger Zelazny and Fred Saberhagen (Coiff) bring us Edgar Allan Poe, among others.

Hollow earth theories have been around nearly as long as sf itself; they are perhaps a parallel outgrowth of the same nineteenth-century extrapolation and speculation that spawned our peculiar branch of literature. As exploration advanced and the earth was mapped and

charted, with new data rolling in every moment, those with fertile imaginations (such as John Symmes, chief source of the hollow earth tradition) tried to predict what marvels the march of science would reveal next.

Early sf used the idea freely—Jules Verne's *Journey to the Center of the Earth* did not follow the Symmes model closely (his adventures found vast caverns, not a completely empty sphere), but did imagine a vast world below the earth's surface. Edgar Rice Burrough's *Pell-mell* books were set on the inside of the great ball of the planet, and he, like other pulp adventure writers, conceived of it primarily as a sort of Lost World, peopled by monsters and lost races, a refuge for the writer at a time when jungle and mountaintop mysteries were becoming hackneyed and daily less likely: Everest might be conquered, Africa's dark secrets unveiled, but the possibility of a hollow earth provided the necessary landscape for adventure.

Further exploration, journeys to the North and South poles, and the advancing understanding of planetary formation in the early parts of this century made the hollow earth unfashionable. Science fiction moved on, imagining unlikely things such as atomic-powered cars and day trips to other stars as nuclear and space sciences became the frontier. Surely, it would seem, were anyone to revive the hollow earth concept now, it could not be approached as anything but fantasy.

But here's Rudy Rucker, a learned mathematician and respected author of numerous popular books of science, presenting us with "a

The New York Review of Science Fiction 5

science fiction novel" (it says so on the cover) about a hollow earth—quite a departure for the author of the radically different "cyberpunk" novels *Syberia* and *Warrior*. The term "science fiction" is used loosely today, but Rucker means it—his hollow earth (or Htrae, as his narrator dubs it—"Earth inside-out") is carefully constructed on known scientific principles. Gravitational forces are calculated and described precisely; one cannot simply wander the inner surface of this hollow earth as one can the outer one, but finds a fine balance of forces that makes a sort of flying the only reasonable mode of motion. Seas do not rest (as in Verne) as they do outside, but float at larger and smaller bodies of water. The light is not (as it is in Burroughs) provided by a small sun, but by the electrical discharge of an Einstein-Rosen bridge, a crossover point between mirror universes, that exists as a singularity at the center of Htrae (Rucker explains this in an afterword; to his characters, it is the Central Anomaly). The E-R bridge causes peculiar gravitational changes between the surface of Htrae and the center, and relativistic time shifts as well.

Thus, Rucker's vision is one of science fiction. But the adventure in the hollow earth is only half the novel; the first half feels much more like historical fantasy of the Powers school: we follow Mason Algiers Reynolds, son of a poor Southern farmer, as his life is disrupted by bad luck and fate, as he becomes involved with historical figures such as Poe and Jeremiah Reynolds, a disciple of Symmes', and as he joins them in breakneck adventures that carry him away from home and family and eventually to the hollow earth. Like Powers, Rucker interweaves the historical and fictional material smoothly; he paints a colorful and convincing picture of the South of Poe's time; he clearly knows the region, and has done his research. *The Hollow Earth* shares some of Powers' peculiar sense of the grotesque:

"You poisoned her [says Mason to Poe], and I do not doubt that you violated her dead body. It is a certainty that you pulled out her teeth; you beat the teeth with you still. You killed Virginia and you defiled her corpse. She deserved better, Eddie. She was only a child" (p. 182).

Such a deadpan delivery, which carries the horror over into a casual absurdity, recalls such Powers works as *The Straits of Her Regard*, wherein one almost wishes to laugh when the heroine, already much battered, bites down on her garlic-filled glass eye to save herself and the hero.

Rucker's use of Poe's actual history and works, however, is less than that typical of Powers. Fairly quickly, we move into the realm of pure fantasy, as Poe and Mason and several others set off for the South Pole, first aboard ship and then by balloon. Here the story resonates with Poe's own novel, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, in which the southern climes are explored and strange lands visited, but the suspected Symmes Hole is neither found nor penetrated. Rucker brings in Dirk Peters, a character from Poe's *Narrative*, as one of his own, and the journey in the south and in the hollow earth takes a number of details from that novel—including the mysterious term "tekeli" and the strange red teeth and snow white skin or fur that typifies the dwellers of Htrae. (The balloon recalls one of Poe's few excursions into science fiction, "The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfall," and his fictitious account of a balloon crossing of the Atlantic, "The Balloon-Hoax.")

In this *The Hollow Earth* is quite different from *The Black Throne*, Zelazny's and Saberhagen's novel is like Rucker's in its dashing pace and sense of adventure, its use of Poe, his parallel-universe double, and Dirk Peters as characters, and even (for one 20-page section) in its reflection of *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* and "Hans Pfall" in a trip to the South Pole and the Symmes Hole, but otherwise its designs are in another direction. There is no visit to the hollow earth here. *The Black Throne* centers on the adventures of Edgar Allan Perry, Poe's alternate-world double who became a soldier instead of a writer; he has been mysteriously meeting Poe and a third person, Annie, in a dreamland he has never believed real—until suddenly, he finds himself in a slightly different world, Poe's natural world, and Poe has been switched to Perry's (ours). The guise of a plot to convert great amounts of lead to gold using Annie's considerable psychic ("incarnate") powers ostensibly drives the book, but its true purpose becomes clear as Perry pursues

Larry Niven My Favorite Story

You wanted short pieces for my favorite story. I find writers are reluctant to name a favorite story. Heinlein used to say, "They all seemed worth writing at the time." Yeah. But this one qualifies—

"Inconstant Moon"

I'm extremely pleased with this tale. I've written too few love stories. This one was for Marilyn. The characters were our earlier selves, and the settings are West Los Angeles, where we lived. I had written most of the story before we were married.

But I was unable to finish it until I showed it to Jerry Pournelle. Jerry gave me the ending; he simply reminded me that I am an optimist. I do not normally write stories in which there is no hope.

From time to time someone tries to turn "Inconstant Moon" into a movie. I grant that it's a little short; we'd have to follow a few more characters. But the locations are easily available, and there aren't any of the fantastically expensive special effects one tends to find in my novels.

Then again, I remember having to explain what a "nova" is to a "producer." Maybe that's the real problem.

Annie and her captors. Piece by piece, Perry's experiences include elements of (and sometimes whole) stories we know as Poe's—by implication, Perry's link to Poe provides the troubled writer with the material he made famous in our world. Thus, Perry is joined in his quest by Dirk Peters and his Ourang-Outang Emerson, the witchy Ligcia and M. Valdemar, a man trapped at the moment of death by hypnotism, forced to live between the worlds (see "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar"). They travel to Paris, where bits from "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," "The Purloined Letter," and "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" crop up as they search for Annie. Later they enter a plague-ridden countryside, where elements from "The Masque of the Red Death," "Hop-Frog," "The Cask of Amontillado" and "King Pest" mingle. (It is interesting that Roger Corman's film version of *The Masque of the Red Death* also combined it with the story of "Hop-Frog"—the connection does seem to work well).

And so on. I have not done all the research necessary, but from my brief, fresher look at Poe's works it seems the authors have worked as many stories and poems as they could into this book, from the well-known such as "The Raven" to the less familiar such as "Metzengerstein" or "The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether." It may even be that all the place and person names that appear in the book, aside from the commonplace (such as New York or Paris), come from Poe's work or life; certainly, a vast number of those I checked did.

For the reader interested in and familiar with Poe's works, this can be advertising pleasure, but sometimes the authors' urge to pack as many references as possible into this Volkswagen becomes too obvious and controls the plot too strongly. For instance, an interlude in Toledo exists only to allow Perry to suffer the torture of the Pit and the Pendulum; when it's over, the plot resumes essentially where it left off. Nevertheless, the story is entertaining and absorbing in the manner of many of Zelazny's earlier Amber books: the pace is quick, the narrator Perry is likable and eloquent, the writing is most readable and occasionally flashes with some of the brilliance fans of *Lord of Light* recall. Like the Amber books, this is not especially deep, but it does show that Zelazny can still construct a rousing and rational adventure (whereas the later Amber novels had cast some doubt).

The Hollow Earth does not suffer from a predetermined agenda in this way, but it too has some distracting flaws. While Rucker by and large seems quite aware of the nature of his predecessors' work on the concept of the hollow earth, the book does occasionally fall back too far on its pulp roots. For example, the relationship between Mason and the native Htraean girl Seela is often trite and contrived:

This was a moment I shall never forget—the two of us

drifting through the mild, sweetly scented pinkish air, only we two, naked, clasped tight to each other . . . it was then, at that moment, that Sela became forever my bride. All my nearly sixteen years of life I'd felt incomplete, not fully real, but now, with Sela, some profound lack in me was filled, some parched longing was finally watered.

"Sela."

"Mason" (pp. 186-187).

Perhaps we might implore this to Mason's age and relative inexperience, but Rucker need not have played it so simply if that were the case.

The *Hollow Earth*, like *The Black Throne*, stays in the shallow end of the literary pool. Rucker seems intentionally to avoid deeper characterization and emotional strife. Near the Central Anomaly, the warping of spacetime creates a sort of ESP among all beings—their thought space overlaps, and when they are very near, the overlap is all but complete. "Pulling on our rope with Sela," Mason says, "I could actually forget which of us was me and which was her" (p. 250). But Rucker records only the good implications of such close contact; Mason is joyous. It seems to me likely that, however much good might come of this, uncomfortable realizations must also occur, if not with Sela, then surely with Poe, whose demented state of mind has been clear for some time. How would close mind contact be with a madman? What changes might Mason go through in such an event? Rucker steer clear

of these questions entirely—the telepathic connection is portrayed in only its good aspect. Similarly, when the party passes through the E-R bridge into the parallel world (ours), Poe plans to kill his double, the Poe of our universe (for reasons I shall not detail). Briefly, Mason acknowledges that the mind contact makes this plan clear, but thereafter, even when they meet the other Poe (*MirrorPoe*) and Mason aids in Poe's plotting to get near his double, Mason makes no mention of his feelings on the subject. I expect pain, dread, fear, guilt, whatever—but Mason is a blank.

In the end, I have been amused and entertained by *The Hollow Earth* and *The Black Throne*. Ultimately, *The Hollow Earth* is the better book: *The Black Throne* is essentially an intellectual game, leaving less in the reader's mind than Rucker's carefully-constructed Hræs when it's done. Both books have minor flaws, but in all they are intelligent, lively, fun-loving adventures, aware of their place and purposes. Their most significant lack is depth. For the most part, the many recent novels and stories employing historical figures have done so in attempts at higher art; Walter Jon Williams' well-received Poe story, "No Spot of Ground," does not devote much time to working in references to Poe's works, but instead uses the facts and possibilities of Poe's life and character to explore questions of war and violence and slavery and hypocrisy. Contrarily, the two novels in question are like the planet of Rucker's title: there's not much under the surface, but for all that the world is hollow, it is an awful lot of fun.

Voyage to the Red Planet by Terry Bisson

New York: William Morrow 1990; \$16.95; 236 pages
reviewed by John Clute

It may be possible to understand that *Voyage to the Red Planet* is going to come off before you reach page 96, but this reviewer, for one, did not, until then, know why. By page 96, almost half the book is gone. Up to this point, Terry Bisson has told his tale with that air of lucky nonchalance that marks the best kind of *learned* writer, the kind whose technical tricks (when noticed) seem serendipitous, heliocentric, like windows in a house of dreams which open only when you need to see the path inwards to the garden in the sun; but he has not yet seemed to bite the bullet of his premise. *Voyage to the Red Planet* is set in the first years of the 21st century. Like a surfer no longer able to ride the wave of Progress, America has sunk backwards into foul waters, bankrupt. Everything is now owned by Disney-Gerber and its competitors. A last spaceship, which has never left orbit, and which is named the *Mary Poppins* because it looks like a furled umbrella, is demobilized by a movie company eager to make humanity's first trip to Mars into a smashing film epic. Clearly we are in a spoof satire country, where everything rusts, nothing is given the worship of venisimilitude. Up to page 96, it has been a very funny story, but a very corroding one. And Mars is a joke.

Nothing seems to happen on page 96. The *Mary Poppins* and crew have managed to escape wrists and gravity, and after several months of induced hibernating have just made the transit of Venus. Captain Kirov (a woman Russian astronaut) needs to get confirmation from Sweeney's privatized Ground Control service that the transit has been successful. Eventually—after the return time lag—his signal comes through. Everything is fine, he says. And just as well,

"since the computers here are tied up with the new Laker Stadium."

"New Laker Stadium?"

"Guess I forgot to tell you," Sweeney said, 18.4 minutes later. "Sweeney's Mission Design went belly-up. I have a new job with Stadium Computer Solutions in Santa Monica. Mostly we do crowd flow and traffic simulations for mall and parking lot designers. Don't worry, I'm still doing the Mars Voyage on my own time. Stadium has a big old Cray that can really crunch numbers and I use it during lunch hour. I'm sending the figures for the Mars orbital capture braking burn, nine months from now, so you can begin to run them through your switchboards."

Which is all funny enough, though rather in Silly Skit mode, and fleetingly reminiscent of the awful Snoo Wilson's *Spacecats* (1984). But the important and the saving thing about this passage is, of course, the Cray. From within the nubilizing corruptions of spoof, but rewriting all the while the spoof jokes and filmian into a three-dimensional gallows' humor, we gain sudden sight of a real world of complex things happening, the Cray crunching the numbers necessary for any sane reader to believe that the *Mary Poppins* is a ship in the mind's eye, not a greasepaint joke, not another example of the essence of the satirist, who typically responds to the world as though it were a machine gone haywire, and whose works have such a horror of motion that it sometimes seems as though motion itself were the enemy. There is something about the kinetic energy of things that horrifies (while exercising a Totentanz fascination over) the kind of writer who attempts to deflate the demons of the world with laughter. But Terry Bisson is a funny man whose every word acts out the movement of things. In his heart he writes novels, not satires; his joints are oiled. His Cray crunches. His verisimilitudinous *Mary Poppins* reaches a real Mars.

The landing is a hard *à tour de force* (in his prefatory note he acknowledges help from Charles Sheffield) and his Mars gives off a sense of Viewmaster durance (he also acknowledges the assistance of Kim Stanley Robinson, whose work in progress, *Green Mars*, will be set, one guesses, on what one might describe as being the very same planet). The cast—a large, variegated, genre-mixing crew of astronauts and movie-town humours and a surly cat and a stowaway—retains its dignity as though gyroscoped, while film options back on Earth collapse and spring back, and Sweeney scrabbles to keep data flowing, and Glamour the dwarf cinematographer shapes and reshapes the tale with his brand-new Demogorgon cameras, which itself reconstructs the bits of reality it sees into themepark artefacts of being; the comic idiocy of the world in which everyone operates seems not so much a series of turns as the thing itself, America After Missing the Wave. The plot eventually thickens. The story ends in a movie successfully completed, which is called *Voyage to the Red Planet*, and in a dignity of denouements that catches at the throat, and a love of Mars, and a number of good jokes. In the end, it is a wing, and a prayer.

John Clute lives in London, England and reviews regularly for Interzone.

The Life of/and Writing

Continued from page 1

that did not, I must admit, have much to do with *sf*—which struck me at once as both extremely talented and deeply flawed.

In the course of the tale, a young man (of seventeen or so) goes walking along a beach one evening. He comes across a group of some dozen bikers and, there, laughing and being hugged now by one, now by another is . . . his girlfriend.

The young man pauses a moment, then calls to her to come to him. She looks at him scornfully—and laughs. Angrily, he marches in and tries to pull her away—whereupon the bikers proceed to beat the living daylight out of him and, leaving him bloody on the sand, get on their motorcycles. With the young woman on the back of the leader's, they ride away. Painfully, the young man goes to the water, washes his face in the sea, and limps off.

The successes of the story were in the physical evocation of surf and sand and evening light. Its failure was in—how shall I say?—a certain emotional extremity. An intelligent, slender young man of seventeen—with glasses—usually does not throw himself into such an obviously suicidal fray quite so easily, quite so unthinkingly, even under the goad of love. It just wasn't believable.

When, in conference, I point this out to young Shakespeare, he pulled his manuscript sharply back in his lap, assuming a position of overtly Freudian self-protection, and declared: "This story is true. And if it's unbelievable, that's just because—I guess—sometimes reality is unbelievable. It all happened. And I put it down just like it was."

What could I say?

As is so often the case, I didn't think of *anything* to say until three hours after the conference was over. Nor did I get a chance to say it until the young man handed in a second story. This one was an *sf*—and was just as talented, though it still had some problems.

"But I want to go back," I said, "and talk about your first story for a minute. Maybe we can throw a little light on the believability problem in general—that was the one about you, and your girlfriend, and the bikers on the beach. Now that's your account of something that really happened. I want you to think back to the original incident. And tell me exactly what occurred."

"Sure," said unsuspecting Sophocles. "It was on the beach—it's on part of Lake Michigan. I was there last summer. And it was evening. I was walking along, when I saw my girlfriend. She was down the sand, with some guys." Here he fell silent.

So I asked: "How many of them were there?"

After another few moments, he said: "Two."

"Bikers," I said. "With motorcycles."

"Bicycles," he said. Then, after another moment: "One of them was wheeling a bicycle."

"Two," I said, "with one bicycle. What did you do?"

"I didn't do anything. I just stood there."

"Was she laughing and having a good time?"

"She had her back to me—so I couldn't tell. The three of them, they were just walking on the beach . . . like I was."

"What was she wearing?"

"White shorts, I think. And a bathing suit under it. Blue, maybe green. Well, I guess she wasn't *really* my girlfriend—I'd talked to her a couple of times in town . . . so maybe she was just my friend." Then he said: "But I'd thought about her being my girlfriend. A lot. And one of the guys had a beer can—or maybe it was soda. I wasn't too close."

"Did she see you? Did you say anything?"

"No," he said. "I don't think she did. I just turned around, after a couple of seconds, and went the other way . . . But then I got real upset—like I couldn't breathe, or I was going to cry or something. So I went down and washed my face in the water." After another few moments, he said: "But you see, it's *based* on the truth, on something that really happened—*basically* it happened."

"Basically," I said, "the twelve bikers, this supposed girlfriend of yours, her scorn, the fight, and her laughter, are a lie. They're a lie you've told yourself to make you feel better about having gotten upset. Now there's nothing wrong with telling lies in fiction. That's what it's all about. I just want to point out that in this case you happened to tell one I didn't believe. And it's often when we're lying to ourselves that we tell the most unbelievable whoppers. You have to watch out for that."

in your writing. It's possible—though I can't guarantee it—you might have a better story if you'd told about what you really saw, what the young woman's relationship to you really was, and how that got you upset when you saw her with two of her friends—then how you were washed your face."

"I thought," he said, "I did . . ."

But of course the language, which is far more truthful than we are, often mirrors of us who use it more than we are prepared to show: It reflects whether we are lying or speaking the truth, or (which I believe is more important than either, because it has not an easy, but a critical, relation to both) whether we are working to put together a rich and rewarding tale.

The notion of language as a mirror has a venerable history in the life of writing (if we may unpack still another meaning from our parent phrase: the life of writing as the *history* of writing). One of its most famous moments is from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Act III, scene ii, when *Hamlet* exhorts the players who will be speaking his lines, "to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the body of the time his form and pressure." It's worth noting here that the Elizabethan audience would have probably heard the word "pressure," in this context, specifically as a printing term, meaning (here) imprint or printed illustration—that is, the term, through typography, *comes* from the life of writing. Perhaps the second best known moment is when the French novelist Stendhal borrowed Shakespeare's image and gave back his own reflection on it, his own interpretation of it, when in the eighteen-thirties he declared that the task of the novelist was to hold the mirror up to nature as one traveled along the road of life:

What is missing in both of these moments for us today is, of course, that mirror in the 1830s, and even more so in Shakespeare's day, tended to be distorted.

What about the mirror's—or the mirroring virgule's—slant?

What kind of distortion is invariably involved with, is inescapable in, the artistic process of reflection, is built in to the very notion of reflection. For even while we sit, giving out our writerly advice to young Balzac to cleave more closely to truth in the tale of his epiphany on the beach, no writer who has examined her or his own process can fail to see something of her- or himself that very young and very talented liar.

So that even for me to recount the tale of our Clarion conference as I did above is finally to tell a lie to myself—a lie that says, even for the moment of the tale, that, in my greater knowledge, I am somehow distinct and different from him; I am his opposite, as left is the opposite of right, as a reflection in a mirror is the opposite and the inversion of what is there in life. For it is precisely in the words with which I suggest this that I am obscuring the troubling truth that, again and again and again (indeed all too often), I am, in too many ways, his double.

Certainly one of the finest meditations on the relation of art to life in this century is in the astonishingly dense and brilliantly articulated prose poem, "Caliban to the Audience," that forms the centerpiece of W. H. Auden's 1944 poetic meditation on Shakespeare's *Tempest*—Auden's *The Sea and the Mirror*. In that prose poem, Auden returns, for a moment, to Shakespeare's mirror, Shakespeare's pressure (that is, Shakespeare's illustration):

You yourself [Auden has his audience, through the voice of Caliban, address the ghost of Shakespeare], we seem to remember, have spoken of the conjured spectacle as 'a mirror held up to nature', a phrase misleading in its aphoristic sweep but indicative at least of one aspect of the relation between the real and the imagined, their mutual reversal of value, for isn't the essential artistic strangeness to which the sinistfully biased image would point just this: that on the far side of the mirror the general will to compose, to form at all costs a fitful pattern, becomes the *necessary cause* of any particular effort to live or act or love or triumph or vary, instead of being as, in so far as it emerged at all, it is on this side, *their accidental effect*?

In the world of art, because pattern and plot, economy and purpose are the method, all incidents are selected (or rejected) with some attention to pattern, order, meaning.

In the world of reality, when pattern or its handmaid insight emerges at all, it is the accident, an excess, mere happenstance.

Isaac Asimov My Favorite Story

My favorite story (of my own) is "The Last Question," which first appeared in the November 1956 *Science Fiction Quarterly*. Why? Well—

1. It was very easy to write, an important point for a lazy writer such as myself.
2. It was an idea which excited me and which I was sure had never been done before.
3. It managed to tell the story of a trillion years of human development and computer refinement in less than 5000 words.
4. It received considerable reader approval.
5. It was made into a planetarium show that knocked the audience (and me) right out of our seats.

Thus, because the context of the two worlds is entirely different, the meaning of every incident in an art work is subtly shifted, so that—on the level where it counts—there is finally no possibility of congruence between the meaning of an incident in an art work and its meaning in the world. Art is rich and strange, and we shouldn't even try to decide ourselves by searching in it for the familiar, much less the truth; in art, *truth* (in the sense of truth-to-life) is the happenstance, the excess, the accident.

For isn't the world of art, Auden also tells us in that same prose-poem, "a world of freedom without anxiety, of sincerity without loss of vigor, feeling that loosens rather than ties the tongue"?

After all, the world of art is the world in which a young man calls to his beloved, fights for her (or his own) honor against ludicrous odds, and—chastened by defeat and disillusion—looks out over the water, tears and the sea indistinguishable on his face, with new and ineffable knowledge.

The world of art is—certainly—the world of this essay, where I can dispense wittily advice to young Kafka with all the eloquence of hindsight, but without stuttering, without having to begin half my sentences over, without having to scratch my ear violently in the middle, and without being so concerned with what young Hemingway before me is feeling—about me, about his story—that I lose my train of thought three times and only manage to mumble something that, out of kindness or terror, he nodsto, blurts, "Yeah—I see," and hurriedly off, in a welter of misunderstanding, to nurse his fear and incomprehension at my fear and incomprehension.

Yet, somehow, sometimes, both in life and in writing, ideas emerge that resonate with eloquence and force, even when they are ideas about hesitation, disillusion, and failure.

Picasso said: "Art is the lie that makes the truth bearable." Some years later, our own Ray Bradbury put much the same point into a poem: "We have our arts so we won't die of truth."

Me, I've always found this a shocking idea. Possibly because I'm a writer, and because writing takes place in time, I've preferred to see art as a self-corrective process, a process of self-vigilance, in which we go back and rethink the tale again, even as we tell it. I something think that process, alone as it is reflected in language, is what constitutes the "truth effect" of language—that, along with beauty, is its greatest worth.

Just after the start of the Great War, two very different thinkers in two very different situations came up with remarkably similar statements about the relation of art to life. In his book, *The Theory of the Novel*, the twenty-five-year-old Hungarian critic Georg Lukács wrote: "The novel is the only art form where ethics is the aesthetic problem." And a year later, in 1916, the year *The Theory of the Novel* was published, the twenty-seven-year-old philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, while on a vacation trip to Norway, jotted down in his notebook, on the 24th of July, "Ethics and aesthetics are one," a comment he retained two years later, in 1918, for the single book he published in his lifetime, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, which appeared in 1922, the same year that T. S. Eliot published his brooding and fragmentary *Wasteland*, the same

year James Joyce published his episodic novel of a single day in Dublin, *Ulysses*, all of which helped to usher in the period of High Modernism, with its highly problematic relation to history and the past.

Up till now, the slant of our mirror has generally emphasized a fundamentally playful relation between life and writing. But was we turn to look at statements such as "The novel is the only art form where ethics is the aesthetic problem," and "Ethics and aesthetics are one," we enter a field where it is all but impossible not to begin to overvalue the relation between writing and life.

What in Western Europe is generally considered Lukács's greatest book, *History and Class Consciousness*, comprised of essays he'd written between 1918 and 1930, Lukács was made to disown by the communist party. And Wittgenstein only wrote for publication one other book, *The Philosophical Investigations*, that, by the year of his death, 1951, he'd not yet managed to shape into a form close enough to what he felt was the truth to publish it—though he had worked on it diligently and continuously. Clearly these were two men who held the relationship of writing and life to be extremely important—as we might guess from their separate statements, if not from their later experiences.

Till now, we have been playing, however seriously, with an argument that must invariably lead to the impossibility of any ultimate congruence between life and art. But now we turn to an argument which, just as seriously, just as playfully, establishes an indiscernible link between them. It does so through another pressure, another imprint, another printing truck.

In 18th Century France, typesetters, handsetting type for contemporary news papers, noticed that newspaper writers used certain phrases again and again. Thus, in order to increase their speed, they would set a number of these commonly used words and phrases beforehand, in special clamps—or clutches. Then, when the phrase came up, they would simply reach over for the clutch containing the pre-set phrase, release the clamp, and slide the type into the typeframe. In French, the word for one of these pre-set clamps was *cliché*.

If clichés were good for printers, as soon as we passed the 1850s, with writers like Flaubert and Baudelaire, it became the general aesthetic consensus that clichés were bad for readers. Indeed, the cliché soon came to be seen as writing without any life at all.

The argument we are talking about here hinges on a paradox, or seeming contradiction, of aesthetic psychology. On the one hand, what tends to move us the most is that which, over the course of our lives, is most familiar to us: it is the poems our parents recited to us when we were children that, when we re-encounter them as adults—no matter how mawkish or, indeed, cliché they are—will bring tears to our eyes or send chills down our spine. (Can one talk about such effects without clichés?) But, at the same time, the phrase or the idea or the plot that has been repeated to us so often, especially recently, so that when we see its opening signs, we can immediately supply its ending, is what evokes from us the groan—or the dismissal of aesthetic displeasure.

The cliché is the basis for the modernist notion of bad art. The goal of avoiding the cliché joins the idea of quality in art to the idea of originality. Avoidance of the cliché in the quest for clarity is the sign of craft in art; and the avoidance of the cliché, whether or not clarity is achieved, is the sign of talent.

But the cliché has another field of existence, where it is equally important; and that is the field of politics. When we say today that such statements as:

"Blacks are shiftless and lazy."

"Women are lousy drivers."

"Gays are emotionally unstable."

—are respectively racist, sexist, and homophobic, what we are saying in effect is that they are *political clichés*. That they occur in life, and work as part of the linguistic stabilizers for complex and oppressive material and economic systems is what makes them ethically abhorrent. That they are repeated as frequently is what makes them aesthetically abhorrent. But they are still very easily pre-set lengths of language that can be put aside on the print-shop shelf, and sooner or later some situation will force us to take one down and use it—if only to decry it. But because certain clichés are abhorrent ethically and aesthetically, the cliché (or, rather, its avoidance) is precisely the place where "Ethics and aesthetics are one." And to the extent that certain plot tropes are in themselves clichés, this becomes the field in which the novel (or any

other narrative art) is a form in which the ethics of avoiding political clichés is, in fact, one with the aesthetic problem of creating a new, lively, and vigorous—while still moving—tale.

The easy answer so many people, sincerely appalled by political clichés, reach for to solve this problem is one style or another of censorship. And while I am all for *censoring* clichés, wherever we find them—whether they are the uplifting and positive ones, or the demeaning and insulting ones—I am never for *censoring* them.

There is something fundamentally wrong with the argument: because I don't want to have certain clichés in the work I write—or in the work I read—then I forbid you to use them in your work. First of all, the relation between the cliché and the deeply moving, as we have already seen, is close and complicated. The relationship may be different for every one of us—with those of us who have had the widest exposure to art generally (another paradox) the most critical of, and at the same time the most accepting of, clichés. And while I might emotionally and ethically approve of certain positive sentiments, expressed in the most hackneyed language, in a political speech, I don't want to find them in a poem! Despite Lukács and Wittgenstein, in practical terms, the identity of political ethics and aesthetics only goes so far.

The West really has only two widely accepted models for the way art relates to life. One is Plato's—and it is a depressing model at that. The sole use of art, Plato reasoned, was to provide positive examples of behavior for the people. Plato was as quick to see as anyone else that the artists of his age spent an awful lot of time telling how their heroes called to their loves and fought twelve bikers to win her; even worse were the ones who told the unhappy truth—that nothing was ever really going to work out right: the biker you happened to do in would turn out to be your old man; and your lover was probably your mother anyway, and when you found out, neither you nor she was going to be terribly happy about it.

What kind of example was that?

Artists were, at their best, liars; and when they were any better, they were substantially worse. In his ideal Republic, Plato banished them—with an argument not so far very different from the one with which Jesse Helms attacked the Robert Mapplethorpe photography exhibit not so long ago.

When confronted with such an argument, what is there to appeal to except the truth in art? In the same way that we all take for granted truth is a good in politics, when art is politicized in this way, we have nothing left to fall back on except the truth art may contain. And, as we search for that truth, the argument of Lukács and the suggestions of Wittgenstein suddenly look even more important, as they appear to locate the place where truth, art, and life really connect—and the endless play of value reversals and the problems of representation, or verification, or exhaustiveness that we begin with in our Shakespeare-Stendhal-Auden house of mirrors suddenly seem a hopeless embarrassment as they suggest that here, even at this most solid seeming spot, all is still

Ben Bova My Favorite Story

It's tough to pick out a favorite.

The *Kinman* Saga has received the most comments from readers and critics. Based on my earlier novels *Millennium* and *Kinman*, the Saga appears to touch readers more deeply than anything I've written.

Yet my personal favorite (at this moment) is the *Voyagers* trilogy: *Voyagers*, *The Alien Within* and *Star Brothers*. They are actually one novel; it simply took three volumes to tell the entire tale. The apotheosis of Keith Stoner from vulnerable human to saint to virtual god is actually a metaphor for our own human evolution—although the critics haven't caught on to that aspect of the novel yet.

I had the most fun, though, writing *Vengeance of Orion*. With Helen of Troy as a major character, I hated to see the story end.

illusion—and Plato was right.

The next major theory of the relation between art and life came only a generation after Plato, from his student Aristotle, who proposed that tragedy, at least, rather than simply setting a bad example, functioned to draw off unhealthy emotions from the audience. Aristotle called it *catharsis*.

The modern critic Kenneth Burke calls this "the lightning-rod theory of art."

Certain bad examples, then, if they were noble enough, taught us humility—rather than encouraged us to go out and pursue sex, drugs, and rock and roll.

And although our modern examinations of the relation between art and life so often start out with the most modern, if not post-modern, of intentions, it's a little unsettling how often the argument ends up with our liberal critic defending his lightning-rod against intransigent old Plato.

My own opinion is that neither Plato's theory of examples, good and bad, nor Aristotle's defense of certain bad examples (noble or not), nor Do I think we can find any way out of the house of mirrors that the prison house of language has turned out to be. Rather I seek my answer in the print shop, from which Shakespeare took his "pressure" and which named for us the *cliché*—and I take just a bit of my answer, as well, from drugs, if not from sex and rock and roll.

Are clichés dangerous?

Yes. They are dangerous to thought, art, and life. But the reason they are not dangerous enough to justify censorship is because, by the time they have become clichés, they have already done their damage.

There are two kinds of drugs. There are drugs like aspirin, called cumulative drugs, which, the more you take, the stronger their effects. There is another type of drug, however, like Darvon, called a titrating drug. Titrating drugs, if you don't take enough of them, don't have any effect at all. At a certain dosage, however—the titration level (usually depending on your body weight)—they suddenly become effective. After that, if you take more, their effect doesn't really become stronger—at least in terms of pain-killing. Their effect doesn't go up or down. It simply turns on or off.

People who espouse censorship have not necessarily fallen for the Platonic argument (although they may have), so much as they have uncritically assumed that the harm political clichés do, when encountered in art, is cumulative. The more frequently you encounter them, they feel, the stronger their harmful effects. But I maintain that the danger of clichés, when they arrive in an aesthetic field (even if they start out as political clichés) is titrating. And the proof that the titration point has been reached is precisely that we recognize them as clichés.

The political cliché does its damage during the five or fifty or five hundred times (depending on your "bodyweight") you encounter it without really recognizing it as a cliché. But once it is recognized, even if it's a cliché you believe in, it cannot do any further harm. Of course sometimes what, for one group, is a repellent political cliché is, for another, a deeply moving theme—a more unsettling situation, certainly; but this is still a matter of psychic/material economics, rather than semantic content. But I shall come back to this pivotal point in a moment.

I said that I seek my answer in the print shop.

The problem with clichés—with the whole shelf full of preset phrases, thousands and thousands of each example, up there in a pile on the shelf—is how much type they use up.

When I gave a version of this argument a couple of years back, at the '87 Sconer in Berkeley, I said that the pathos of clichés was the vast area of silence they imposed around themselves—a silence in which almost nothing else could be said or heard. But here I can say, with another metaphor, if less poetically, the same thing: clichés simply take up too much room on the social print-shop shelf—or too much room in what has come to be called the universe of discourse.

Every time a cliché is said or heard, a live and insightful observation about the world—that is the case—is not being said or heard. And while that universe may be relatively infinite for society, for each individual it is limited.

That sense of limitation, along with the incorrect assumption of clichés' cumulative damage (and a sneaking suspicion that perhaps Plato was right), is another reason, if only from the feeling of exhaustion it

evokes, why well-intentioned people, who otherwise uphold the constitution, finally find themselves condoning censorship.

It's very important to remind people again and again and again—and also to remind the best-intentioned people, because they forget this too—that what makes statements like "Blacks are lazy and shiftless," "Women are lousy drivers," or "Gays are emotionally unstable," racist, sexist and homophobic is the vast statistical preponderance of these particular statements in the general range of utterances of most people most of the time. That statistical preponderance makes it almost impossible to say anything else about blacks, women, or gays. Again, it's the silences in the discourse such statements enforce around themselves that give them their ideological contour. But this is why you have to correct the statistical imbalance. And it is the titrating aspect of the damage clichés do that makes it futile for people to try to censor such

statements in an attempt to right oppressive wrongs. You don't right the imbalance—the inequality—by suppressing discourse. What you have to do is allow, to encourage, even more: you must intrude new discourse into the area of silence around these statements and broaden the field of truth. Then such statements just become comments about one or a few observed individuals, statements that are either right or wrong, silly or interesting.

Language, and the political clichés that fill so much of it, whether that language comes in novels or barroom chatter or boardroom discussions, is not the oppressive system itself. Language is merely a stabilizer of those various systems. As language stabilizes, other language de-stabilizes. And that is why, if you are fighting at the level of language, it is best to fight language with more language—more accurate, more logical, more convincing language.

Catalogue Number 87

Science Fiction First Editions

The House Specials

is now available for \$7.00 (refundable with order)

James Blaylock

Orson Scott Card

Samuel R. Delany

Philip K. Dick

Thomas M. Disch

Dean R. Koontz

Tim Powers

Gene Wolfe

Roger Zelazny

An extensive listing of these authors only — about 400 items. Also available is Catalogue 80: Science Fiction First Editions — the other authors (1161 items) and Catalogue 81: Modern First Editions — mainstream (907 items). Each catalogue is \$7.00 which includes First Class postage and is refundable with order.



Christopher P. Stephens
7 Terrace Dr
Hastings-On-Hudson NY 10706
(914) 478-2522

Remember (and here I'm back to what, I suspect, is the most difficult and controversial point in my whole argument):

It is not the content of the statements that makes them offensive. Nor is it even the intention of the speakers.

Take the statement, "Blue-eyed people are irresponsibly morose." That's not a racist statement because it's not among the first three things you'll hear about blue-eyed people in any bar or coffee klatch as soon as the topic of blue-eyed people comes up. It's not a racist statement because it's not part of the stabilization system for an economic matrix that assures blue-eyed people will average incomes 30% lower than the rest of us. It's not a racist statement because 80% of all the artistic representations of blue-eyed people, from folk operas to genre paintings to popular novels, do not automatically portray them as mooning away (irresponsibly) while catastrophes bloom around them; nor do the other 20% of the representations—the liberal ones—portray them as overcoming that moroseness with a mindless and wholly unbelievable vigor. It's not a racist statement because it's not part of a system that encourages three-quarters of the blue-eyed population, whenever they feel even vaguely down, to search immediately for possible irresponsibility—who then feel, if they don't find it, that it itself is probably proof they're irresponsible.

What is the statement, "Blue-eyed people are irresponsibly morose" today? It's a phrase that might appear in a mildly surrealistic poem, a phrase with a vaguely ironic cast, a phrase that may mildly amuse. It's a phrase whose interest is, in short, almost wholly aesthetic. But such a statement *could* become part of such an oppressive system. And there are many blue-eyed people (many of them rather morose over the last few decades' protests from blacks, women, and gays, as well as over blacks', women's, and gays' changing position in our society) whom one would like to remind just how the process of making such a statement racist works—and whom one would like to see just a little more responsible in their analysis of what is getting them so down . . .

In terms of you and me, however, whether in the house of mirrors that is art, or in the often equally-confusing house of mirrors that is the world, each of us has to seize the cliché down from the shelf, dismantle it to the letters and, along with the rest of the typebox, use those letters to *write out something else*.

After listening to all this, some of you might still want to ask: "Well, what about the *other* story?"

What other story?

The other story young Heinlein turned in back at Clarion: the science fiction story that you said he handed in after the first one about the guy and the girl and the bikerson the beach. What about the relation between art and life in sf?

I'm sure I don't have to tell you that everything I've said here I feel applies just as strongly to sf.

But what about what makes of special—what makes it exciting, different, a genre of its own, with its own special delights? Don't those features—the rockets, the ray guns, the imaginative scientific extrapolation—make it less like reality, and therefore more susceptible to the Platonic argument of "bad example" or "no example at all"?

They certainly do; and it's an argument you will hear again and again leveled at science fiction—often by critics who started out proclaiming how sympathetic they were to science fiction.

But there's one more aspect to clichés that we haven't touched on. It's a place where the term "cliché" is probably not the proper one: rather the term "genre convention" is more appropriate—though what we are speaking of bears a strong structural relation to the clichés of language, in the same way that plot tropes do. But it is as hard to distinguish a genre convention from a cliché as it is to distinguish what, from childhood resonance, moves us to tears and chills from what, in light of adult sensibility, bores us to distraction. Why, in fact, one cliché should become a deep and resonant theme, that, when we discern it in works from any number of genres, moves us profoundly, while another, when it slides across the surface of a text, should be a sign of everything that is trite and dull and unthinking, while still another should become an almost invisible convention that helps hold a given genre stable, is one of the great mysteries of art. The only thing I will hazard here is to suggest that, as is the case with political clichés, it is not

the content that controls clichés' meanings or affects, but rather the different, larger economies into which each has been drawn.

Although they don't usually sit around in their own clamps, genre conventions are nevertheless real, recognizable, and articulate. It's worth noting, then, some of the things they say.

The overriding convention of sexual excess that characterizes pornography says, for example, that any and every social situation, by just the slightest pressure, can become overtly and rapturously sexual. The overwrought conventions of modern romance, or "bodice buster," says that any and every social situation can, with equally little pressure, become overtly and rapturously romantic. Both are lies. But I'm not sure which lie is the more pernicious.

The conventions of the old-fashioned mystery tell us that crime—however random and violent it looks—is the product of intelligence, cunning and planning; and that the solution to the crime is therefore always more intelligence, cunning, and planning. The more modern procedural absorbs the intelligence of the detective into a pre-operationalized set of tasks, which, if we follow them mechanically, will get us our man—or woman.

Both tell major lies about crime—for the vast majority of crimes today still go unsolved and are often spontaneous, violent, and are all but without motivation of the sort a court might recognize. As a genre, I have no doubt that the range of crime fiction tells far more pernicious lies than either pornography or romance. But I staunchly oppose censorship for any of them.

Science fiction . . . well, as many have said before: its first message to us is that there will be a future. And the range of possible futures the genre presents suggests that the future is not deterministically predictable. That range also tells us that specific choices we make today will be a factor in determining which of those futures arrives—an interesting comment for writing to make about life.

Now whether or not the promise of a future, or our part in bringing it about, is another generic lie, I don't know. Certainly I hope it's the truth—which is one reason I like science fiction.

Another of genre convention whose message I have always been drawn to is the one conveyed by the topological convention of the space opera.

The Copernican Revolution succeeded in striking humanity from its place at the center of the universe. With its panoply of worlds a-swirl around a galaxy of suns, those suns all a-swirl around each other in their cloud of galaxies, the space opera goes on to strike the notion of a fixed centrality itself from the armamentarium of our thinking. There are only constantly relative, forever moving centers; and everything from our technology to our sociology, from passion to intellect, are potentially reevaluable in such a field.

The apprehension of the physical field in which, on a vaster and vaster scale, we are constantly and repeatedly decentred, and the concomitant revaluation of woman, man, and mind that takes place there, we call the sense of wonder. It moved me greatly when I was a child. And I still try to explore those revisions of values with accuracy and insight in such a way that the wonder may still assail. As an adult, I've looked across a great and rugged canyon gap in the sun-glazed noon. A week later, at dawn, I've looked out over the aluminum-colored sea. And a few nights later I've stared up at the precise and distant glimmer of the stars in all that black. Now anyone can see these as three examples of limenosity. But what science fiction has done for me is given me an immediate sense of the vastly differing order of immensity each represents—canyon, sea, and stars. There is your sense of wonder; there is your decentring field, within which all that is human is always up for revaluation.

Science fiction of course tells lies too. Like so much art it tends to suggest the world is simpler than we know it to be. But whether we respond to that as a remediable aesthetic problem that may be overcome, at least partially, by the next sf story or novel we read, or a reprehensible political problem fundamental to the sf *Weltanschauung*, will probably have a lot to do with whether or not we like sf.

The young writer I spoke of in my early anecdote went on to publish two of novels—one two years after he was out of Clarion and one a few years after that. As I said, he was immensely talented. And by the time the first appeared, he was over his believability problems. Then

he went off and got a Ph.D. in linguistics and moved to the west coast for a decade and a half to work as a programmer for an electronics company with vocal data input. I really thought he was lost to sf as a writer forever. About five days ago, however, I got a package from him.

(This story is true. It all happened. And I'm putting it down just like it was.)

It contained the MS. of a new novel.

It's at home on my work table. I haven't read it yet. But getting it in the post, opening up the tan book-mailer, and reading his long

and chatty cover letter, brought back all the thoughts and thinking I've tried to mirror for you this evening.

I intend to read the manuscript first thing when I get home. Given how much I enjoyed his first two novels, I expect I'll enjoy this one . . .

What a life!

First given as the Guest of Honor speech at the 1990 Com Diego, August 31, 1990, in San Diego.

Luke McGuff Small Press Reviews

Prophets of doom could make a good case for placing the sf short story magazine on the endangered species list. In fact, the number of "nationally distributed newstand magazines" is smaller than it's ever been since paper rationing during World War II (*Animar*, *PC&SF*, *Analog*, *Amazing*, *Interzone*).

This is unhealthy for the field. First, there isn't enough market diversity to allow something like the New Wave of the '60s to start. It's too easy for publishers to stagnate, like the Big Three Autonews did, the Big Three Networks did. Second, it puts too much focus on one or two markets at the expense of others. Third, every editor is forced by physical constraints to return work he or she considers publishable.

On the other hand, the small press magazine is booming. Cheap copying and desktop publishing have led to a revolution in this field, as shoestring-budgeted magazines come and go like fireflies, and we thought it would be appropriate to list a couple of the magazines that we found worthy of comment.

All opinions expressed herein are mine. If I'm missing your favorite magazine, tell me about it. If you do a magazine, please send it to me for review: Luke McGuff, 4121 Interlace Ave., No., Seattle, WA 98103. [General NYRSF review copies, small press or otherwise, should continue to be sent to Box 78, Pleasantville, NY 10570.]

One major caveat: I don't have the time, and NYRSF doesn't have the space, for any attempt at completeness. On the other hand, I hope we have the room to tell you about non-genre magazines of interest.

Let the cartoons begin!

Journal Wired: A quarterly

Spring, 1990; \$10.00; 175 pages

From: P.O. Box 76, Shingletown, CA 96088

Journal Wired has the meat and muscle necessary to produce an exceptional magazine. With the distribution and publishing contacts of Mark Ziesing and the design talents of Arnie Fenner and Andy Watson, JW's first two issues are excellent.

Fenner did the logo, and some interior design. Watson does the regular production, and he brings a genuine sophistication to the way he shapes a page.

The three stories in #3 are a prime example of why a variety of markets is important to authors of every stature. Lew Shiner's "Kidding Around" is a nice, simple story about an adolescent girl trying to figure out those weird adults. Shiner writes with the depth of characterization and feeling he's known for. Where, indeed, is the genre writer (no matter how good) going to get his non-genre material published? I'm glad JW was there to publish this story.

The other two stories—"Noodling" by Jonathan Lethem and "Cockflight" by Paul DiFilippo—use a saturated language filled to bursting with currently trendy buzzwords that will date the stories in two years. With "Cockflight" in particular I spent as much time deciphering the language as I did enjoying the story.

In terms of special effects and personal events, "Noodling" is the slighter story. But when it ended, I thought the protagonist had realized something about himself he had previously suppressed.

Here we have three writers: Shiner, well-established, a "name." DiFilippo, who's been emerging for the last couple years. And Lethem, who's had a couple stories published, but with whom this is my first

acquaintance. Even though I have a couple complaints with the stories, none of them bored me, and to me that's more important than a glossy perfection.

"Through the Wire" by Michael A. Banks (first of a column) was long but enthusiastic, and presented information new to both neophytes (myself) and the experienced. "Over the Shoulder" by J.B. Reynolds made me go "Yes, but . . ." and "wait a minute . . ." and "Hah! Pretty funny, wiscguy!" Which is exactly what its author intended, I betcha. Also quite relevant is "Operation Green Merchant Exposed!" by Dave Hyde, which details the lengths a bad government can go in harassing its citizens. I didn't finish reading Lucius Shepard's "Remedial Reading for the Generation of Swine." It was time to call it a night.

I think it was Poul Anderson who said he was competing with the readers' beer money. These days, it's video rentals, but the effect is the same. JW is worth skipping a few video rentals for. (N.B.: #1 is still available for \$7.50, and #3 is in production as I type.)

Strange Plasma #2

\$3.00; 40 pages

From: Edgewood Press, P.O. Box 264,
Cambridge, MA 02238

Strange Plasma has distinguished itself quickly: A story in #1 was picked for Dozois' 7th annual best of the year, and #2 has stories by R.A. Lafferty and Gene Wolfe, plus interviews of Tim Powers and Ellen Kushner, and the first installment of a column by Gwyneth Jones.

The Lafferty is prime Lafferty, as pyrotechnic as anything he's done. "The Flag" by Gene Wolfe was originally published in *Stories from the Old Hotel*, but this was my first acquaintance with it. I found it interesting, and was tempted to start a magazine called *The Flag* (until I remembered that there was a magazine called *The Match*). This story felt like a tribute to the samizdat of Eastern Europe, and the role they played in chipping away their governments.

"Qualitative Science," a column by Gwyneth Jones, suffered from a lack of focus on the part of the writer. What she had to say was buried under unintentional misdirection. Charles Stross's story, "Approaching Xanadu," felt a notch or two lower in intensity than something that could have been in *Interzone*.

It's obvious from the number of ads and the contributors that the editor and publisher, Steve Pasechnik, has already developed a number of connections. In the intro he says, "publishing a small press magazine is far more difficult than I imagined." That's true, but in my past attempts I've found the thrill of being able to present work similar to what he presents here to be more rewarding than the obstacles and drudgery were tiring. I hope *Strange Plasma* and Steve persevere, as the issue that I've seen looks like a product that should continue.

Two non-genre magazines of interest are *Forced Exposure* and *Monado 2000*.

FE is mostly famous for covering such musical luminaries as the Butthole Surfers, Lisa Suckdog and many others. (In fact, the Lisa Suckdog article is called "The Mistress is a Lewd Mooner." Get it! Har!) Of particular interest to we sci-fi heads, though, is Lew Shiner's small

press/books review column, "Notes from Left Field." Also, Lili Dwight has a long article on Octavia Butler called "The Whole Damn Shelf." You might, as I do, have some technical quibbles with Ms. Dwight's article, but it's there, and when was the last time you saw a genre magazine take the time to evaluate an author's entire work? (On newsstands or in music stores, or: *Forward Examiner*, P.O. Box 9102, Waltham, MA 02254, \$3.00)

Mondo 2000 is a zero-futurist magazine. That means it's more scary than boring. Not scary because of ecdoodom and gloom, but because these people are out there living and/or inventing it as the case maybe. My first reaction was to condemn it for being irresponsible. But then I realized sometimes you gotta jump or get clobbered.

Summer 1990 has a long section on "virtual reality," a new development in human/computer interface that is already influencing the language and stories of sf. Interestingly enough, though, a good

amount of VR lingo comes from Bill Gibson, most notably "cyberpunk" and "cyberspace." This could be the first time since Heinlein was working on "atmosphere suits" for the Navy that sf has had such a direct influence on scientific research.

Mark Pauline, of Survival Research Laboratories, is interviewed by John Shirley and some others. There's an interview with the mathematical roots rocker, Phil Alvin. There are a couple articles about mad viruses, by the people who instigated them. The general thrust of *M2* is to take the media onslaught, the spectacle, the future, and create or recreate it in your own image. *M2* calls itself "New Edge." Highly recommended. (Also on newsstands, or: *Mondo 2000*, P.O. Box 10171, Dept. M-2, Berkeley, CA 94709. \$5.95.)

Luks McGuff recently moved to Seattle.

More About *Hyperion*

Since Dan Simmons' *Hyperion* won the Hugo Award for Best Novel, and some are already calling it a classic and a masterpiece, we thought it would be interesting to continue the discussion begun in these pages by Robert Killheffer's review in Issue #22.

Richard A. Russo A Note About *Hyperion*

I must protest Robert Killheffer's review of *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion* in the June 1990 issue. While seeming to praise the "stunning breadth and depth" of the books, he nevertheless manages to leave a rather negative impression of what the reader may expect to find.

For example, he claims that they are "consistently marred" by the kinds of awkwardness and repetition that he quotes, implying that the books are full of such infelicities and therefore trying to read. It's simply not so. I could quibble over his specific examples (e.g. what he cites as repetition looks that way when taken out of context, but the passages are separated by 33 pages and the "repetition" actually serves to remind the reader what was happening when he last followed those characters), but obviously this is partly a matter of taste. I found the book to read smoothly. More importantly, I don't read criticism to have awkward sentences pointed out to me. Instead of nitpicking, why didn't Killheffer explore some of the serious structural problems of the book, and how they may have been generated by the decision to publish it in two halves instead of the one (shorter) book that it should be?

My major complaint concerns Killheffer's closing remarks, accusing Simmons of "a burst of unconvincing transcendentalism." This is a familiar issue in the field; indeed, some have argued that all great sf is, in the end, mystical. If this is true, why is it true? If it is not, why not?

And if Killheffer disagrees with Simmons, what "more sensible and fulfilling conclusion" does he have in mind? I expect more from a NYR/SF review than just a knee-jerk response and a quote from Spinrad.

Most importantly (this is what irritated me enough to write this letter), Killheffer gives a completely distorted impression of how the book ends, which makes his review unfair to both Simmons and your readers. The "burst of transcendentalism" that so bothers him is, in fact, a minor part of the finale, a brief (though important) gloss on the resolution of just one of the many plot lines. Far more significant, both thematically and in terms of plot, is the voluntary destruction of the Farcaster portals, resulting in the loss to humanity of both teleportation and the artificial intelligences of the Core. It is this central event which lingers in the reader's mind long after the book is finished, for it brings together and resolves all the major plot lines and amplifies the main theme (already apparent in how our view of the Ousters has changed by the end of the book): that the hope and grandeur of the human race lies not in homogeneity and stasis, but in its diversity and continued evolution.

Richard A. Russo lives in Berkeley, California

Robert Killheffer The Fallout of *Hyperion*

Recently I have received a couple of rather strident objections to my review of Dan Simmons' epics *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion*—you may have encountered one of them in the letter column, with a brief response of mine. The one above, from Richard A. Russo, arrived mere days before I read Norman Spinrad's review of *Fall* (in the October 1990 *Asimov's*). Spinrad's review, and many others I have seen since I wrote my own (such as Dan Chow's in *Locus*), complain of fundamental structural problems in the two books, and Russo's letter mentions this as a more pertinent issue than those I raised in Issue #22.

Let me first say, with feeling, that despite Russo's impression, I think very highly of these books. I thought I made that clear at every turn in my review, but if not, I want to enter it into the record now. Simmons is an exciting writer: unpredictable, gutsy, seemingly able to do anything well, and do it better than other, narrower talents on their own turf. I await his forthcoming horror novel, *Summer of Night*, as eagerly as I devoured the *Hyperion* books. By my complaints I do not seek to denigrate his accomplishments in the *Hyperion*s; I simply feel that more judicious editing and care might have removed the problems, and turned these books into masterpieces. I felt the disappointment one

might (to borrow the metaphors of Don Kellor) at an almost-no-hitter, with a sudden hit coming in the bottom of the ninth. So close—terribly, gloriously close—to perfect.

When I wrote my review, I ignored certain issues that I, unaware of most other critical opinion, considered tangential: most notably, that of structural problems. I had seen Spinrad's comments on *Hyperion* alone, and knew that he had been outraged by the "cliffhanger" ending he perceived, but I did not know how widespread this opinion was. But now, it seems, the issues I avoided are those dearest to some hearts, and I would like to address them.

I agree with many of Spinrad's criticisms, and have said so already: the repetitiveness of *The Fall of Hyperion* is a significant problem; Simmons could have cut it and saved book pages and reader patience. However, I cannot agree that the decision to publish these works as two separate volumes makes any difference to an aesthetic appreciation of them. *The Fall of Hyperion* is a vastly different book in structure, tone, and narrative voice; given Simmons' strong reliance on the models of Keats' two unfinished poems, this difference is inevitable, and would be every bit as strong whether the text were bound together or separately.

More importantly, I don't think the sharp break between the books harms them; in fact, there are ways in which the variant structures and voices adds depth and power to Simmons' work.

I thought, as I read the first hundred pages of *The Fall of Hyperion*, that the structure was weaker than that of the first; I could see no reason for abandoning the tight, controlled narrative of *Hyperion*. Then I realized that Simmons was mirroring the shift between Keats' poems; *Hyperion* was a third-person narrative, removed from the person of Keats, and when the poet scrapped it and redrew his plan, he decided he needed to insert himself as a first-person narrator, to bring himself and his experience closer to the material. Simmons narrates his *Hyperion* in third person, each character tells a first-person story of their own, and, once the stage is set, he resolves the themes in the second book, inserting John Keats as a first-person narrator. There is a structure, that of Keats' poems, and it has a purpose: the background information from *Hyperion* can be explored through the eyes of the pilgrims, but (just as Keats realized he needed to change the narrative perspective to attempt to resolve his poem) Simmons knew he needed a different, single, and more personal viewpoint from which to approach *The Fall of Hyperion*. The story of the pilgrims remains a central part of *Fall*, but the resurrected persona of Keats, narrating both his own life and the experiences of the pilgrims as he dreams them, offers a unified perspective better suited to merging the disparate elements. *The Fall of Hyperion* is meant to be distinct from *Hyperion*, not just a continuation of it, and its structure reflects this difference.

Spinrad's greater difficulty was with the first volume. I have just offered one possible justification for the two-volume format, but I think Spinrad's whole reading premise is faulty. Just as Dante's *Inferno* (and, indeed, the entire *Divine Comedy*) is the culmination of a long-standing medieval literary tradition of guided tours of the afterlife and the Otherworld, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (from which *Hyperion* takes its form) is the pinnacle of an enduring tradition of medieval letters: the framed narrative. Many examples survive, from the well-known Arabic *Thousand and One Nights* and Boccaccio's *Decameron* to the less familiar *Sendabar* and Petrus Alfonsi's *Disciplina Clericalis*. In such works, the frame serves to explain and set the stage for the many short stories within; often, it establishes likely moral lessons and purposes which the subsequent text cleverly undermines. (So the *Disciplina*, ostensibly a moral training book for monks and seeming to declare the untrustworthiness and depravity of women, actually portrays the lechery and sinfulness of men and the wit and intelligence of their injured wives and lovers. Such is the subtlety that, approached with a certain attitude, the proposed lessons seem to fit; with an open mind and some thought, the distinctions become abundantly clear.) The frame is not the point of the text; the focus of the *Thousand and One Nights* is not

whether Scheherazade will or will not be executed, but the stories she tells and their interplay with the brief framing commentary. If the reader approaches the text expecting a directed, structured tale of Scheherazade's escape from danger, they will likely be bored to tears by the hundreds of thousands of words in between.

So too with the *Canterbury Tales*. It's not about a bunch of pilgrims on their way to the shrine; that's the setting, the frame, the background against which we see a myriad personal accounts, playing off of each other and the frame to compose a wandering, episodic, but immensely satisfying tapestry vision of the medieval life and times. One never even learns that they do reach Canterbury; if the reader expects that as the climax, they will be sorely disappointed, crying foul and bemoaning the baseness of the author who leaves them with such a cliffhanger.

Simmons did not choose to model his *Hyperion* on Chaucer's work without purpose. Here, too, it is a mistake to place too much importance on the ultimate goal of the pilgrimage; yes, it is clear throughout that there will eventually be a resolution of *that* question, too, but it is equally clear (to me) that the real point of this book is the six stories it contains. As in the *Canterbury Tales*, each is different from the others in style, tone, attitude, topic—they work off of each other, adding data, changing perspective, and by the end, they have jointly created a remarkably detailed impression of the world that formed their narrators, and have neatly revised the assumptions set out in the opening frame. We have learned the fate of Old Earth, the history (sketchily) of the Hegemony and human expansion into the galaxy; we've seen various cultures and exotic planets, encountered strange religions and curious alien creatures; we know that the society of the Hegemony is static, in many ways unchanged and unchanging since the twenty-first century. All along, I felt that the questions being answered in *Hyperion* were not about what would happen once they reached the planet and confronted the Shrike, but instead about what had already happened, which we would need to know before seeing the outcome of the quest. I was not disappointed by the sudden ending because, recognizing the framed narrative format, I did not expect otherwise; I had gotten six full-blown, complete narratives in this book, which added up to more than the sum of their parts; I did not expect the frame to have a similar Aristotelian beginning-climax-resolution structure. In focusing on the framing story rather than on the individual narratives that form the core and purpose of the text, Spinrad (by no means alone) has missed the point—and missed the best argument against his criticism of Simmons and his editors.

For Spinrad is complaining most about the lack of (perhaps impractical but nonetheless admirable) adventurousness in today's publishing, too much of the bottom line and not enough of literary

The leading specialist in
SCIENCE FICTION
AND FANTASY LITERATURE



—catalogues issued—

L. W. Currey, Inc.

Box 187, Elizabethtown, NY 12932
(518) 873-6477

excellence. But Spinrad's criticisms of the *Hyperion* books spring from an assumption that this is a typical, run-of-the-mill *novel* in two volumes, which it is not—they are two distinct books; and, more specifically, from the preconception that each volume is in any way meant to be read *as a novel*, with all the structural traits that may imply. (Thus Dan Chow complains, "The trouble with the *Canterbury Tales* as a model is that it predates what we have come to think of as a novel," *Locus* 9/89, p. 29.) Rather, *Hyperion* would seem to be just what Spinrad claims is so rare: a book that challenges the category, that adheres more to older literary principles than to the demands of the marketplace, a book that represents a significant and successful attempt to succeed without bowing to the mundane requirements of an Aristotelian plot structure, a smooth transition between volumes, or an appeal to the uneducated and unlettered. It is this irony that stirred me to write these words, the shock that, of all complaints, someone might argue that Simmons' books were *not demanding enough* of their

audience and the marketplace.

The *Hyperion* books are marred by repetitious "back-story," as Spinrad says, particularly the second volume, and by other inauspicious moments, including a vague, mystical and unsatisfying resolution to what I (contrary to Mr. Russo) regard as one of the *main* thematic threads—how to live and be happy in a universe that offers suffering and pain. Yet, where they go wrong is *not* on structural grounds. Seen from an open-minded perspective, willing to accept uncommon (in twentieth-century fiction, especially science fiction) literary forms (the out-of-fashion framed narrative) and depths of allusion (the clear debt to Keats), the structure of each volume is sensible and successful, and the two-volume format is not only less jarring but inevitable as well. Whatever my minor disappointments in these works—that they were *oh so close* but just missed *rarest perfection*—I would not deny Simmons the respect that this viewpoint offers; I had hoped others would not either. ▶

Heathern by Jack Womack

New York: Tor Books, 1990; \$16.95 hc; 256 pages
reviewed by Victor Gonzalez

The comparison of Jack Womack to Anthony Burgess is at best obtuse (or, on the other hand, a cover copywriter's dream); although they both play with speculative English dialects, and both are fond of traumatic violence, they are fundamentally different writers. Womack's fiction has the psychological depth of Dick and the narrative drive of Tiptree; one is propelled through the lives of sympathetically passive characters by an afterburner-on plot, consistently one level below it. *Heathern*, like his other novels—*Ambient* (1987) and *Terraplane* (1988)—is a surreal but clipped view of an unpleasant future: within it one finds twisted stories of people, relationships, communities, corporations, nationalizations, and Gods. His is a world of evident evil, unseen trust, and cryptic subliminal agendas. Womack, unlike Burgess, is not interested in scaring us with the future we may create; the story is not about the dystopia itself (as bleak as it is)—rather, it is about the people and interactions that exist within.

The future of the three novels is consistent; Womack notes in an afterword that there are three books to follow. It is a world that has been fragmented by catastrophe and is restructuring in an Orwellian mode, corporations taking action without regard to law or morality (both of which they believe they own), wars regulated and supplied as though they were World's Fairs, and individuals, as always, relativistically finding a way to fit in. Joanna, the first person voice of *Heathern*, an experienced and abused woman who tries to relate to her latest inner circle (nearest the top at Womack's favorite powerhouse, Dryco) mostly interprets and reacts psychologically; Joanna is surrounded by the true movers, a crazy boss, his driven wife, a glacial intellectual, and several vicious yet rational (and, if one is not turned off by the brutality, sympathetic) bodyguards. By way of the religious aspect of the book (the most central and surreal) she moves through all levels of the plot and unifies it.

The turbulent severity of *Heathern* is appealing. People adapt to the structures of their world to survive, or, as is frequently pointed out, they don't. One of Joanna's protectors (and a former lover) is described:

During his twenties he feasted from faith's buffet, swallowing and passing Unitarianism, Catholicism, Reform Judaism, Buddhism and more, at last assembling a plate of scraps from which he might thereafter nibble. His unshaken tenet was a belief in an afterlife so redemptive of the life lived before that he saw no greater purpose to his own existence than to relieve others of theirs (p. 18).

The benign corporate environments that much of current sf (for example Sterling's *Islands in the Net*) seems to favor don't reflect well the current ethical attitudes exhibited by modern multi-nationals; Womack's bitter pessimism catches a clearer glimpse. Perhaps writers prefer nicer worlds because they make writing sympathetic characters easier. *Heathern* attempts no such escape: it is set in a nasty New York,

with nasty corporate monarchs and conspiring royal courts. The class system is a caste system; the untouchables die in overcrowded hospitals or on the streets, their passing perhaps overseen by an understanding onlooker, but any chance of change overwhelmed by bureaucracy and the status quo. "It's certainly corporate," said Bernard. "Too many aspects of it are too senseless for it not to be" (p. 96). A nasty North America, to be sure, but not unlike certain dictatorships within recent history, and probably nicer to live in than many places are now.

Womack has no need to speculate on the potential for a terrible world; he reads the papers. Nor is he giving us a warning (except implicitly); instead he is explaining how people might get along in this future. The final question of *Heathern*, from this perspective, is one of ethics versus survival: Joanna ends up making a choice between her possessions and her conscience.

The use of language in all three books is closely tied to two factors: caste and profession. Taking a Postman-esque view of typography and telegraphy (see *Amusing Ourselves to Death* by Neil Postman, New York: Penguin, 1985), he sees the written forms as having less and less influence on the spoken forms. In *Ambient* Womack gave us three essentially different dialects: one for businessmen (royalty), one for the security staff (clergy), and one for the wonderfully surreal counterculture, the Ambients themselves (uh, weird peasants). In *Heathern* he establishes that there is still a remnant of "typographic" English, and most of the first person narrative (as well as parts of the two previous books) is in this mode. Like Burgess (back to the simplistic *Clockwork Orange* companion), the altered forms can be tough to get through for a while (the first section of *Terraplane* is very dense), but they fit well into the social matrix he develops and eventually become natural. Womack is a stylist; he often manipulates the language beyond the obvious connotations; he is alternatively terse and lyric, and loves to throw in a silly joke or an embedded metaphor ("A dark triangle of park lay between Duane Street's legs," p. 58). It is useful to read him closely.

"Heathern" is a southern pronunciation of "heathen"; this book has a strong, central, though amorphous, religious element. Lester, a proclaimed messiah, is hired by Dryco to influence world affairs: Joanna becomes a working accomplice, giving us subjective information about his divinity, and developing a close relationship with him. What Lester is must be left to the reader, but in his character Womack explores both the damning and purifying elements of American Protestantism; the power of religion and what people make of it and use it for: a tool and a sanctuary, perhaps the confusion that faith induces or eliminates. Previously Womack has explored idol worship, his particular favorite being Elvis; this is a more direct confrontation with the same thing. It is hardly a view with clarity, nor could it be; it is a show of virtuosity that he is able to make this the hub around which the book rotates and ultimately resolves.

Heathern is tight, straightforward and bizarre. It is a troubling

examination of upbringing in family and society, but it makes no pretentious attempt to solve the psycho-social situations it presents. It is not based on technology, but on control and love, and that its surreal aspects succeed. Each of Womack's novels has tried a different approach; this one is the most challenging and complex. It does not

attempt to equal the slick transcendence of *Terraplane*; rather it is transcendent in the original Christian sense of the word—a painful surfacing through glass.

Victor Gonzalez is currently studying at Columbia University.

Walls of Fear edited by Kathryn Cramer

New York: William Morrow, 1990; \$19.95 hc; 395 pages
reviewed by Joan Gordon

Walls of Fear, edited by Kathryn Cramer, is a companion volume to *The Architecture of Fear*, edited by Cramer and Peter D. Pautz, which received the 1988 World Fantasy Award for Best Anthology of the Year. *Walls*, like its predecessor, contains fine stories and thoughtful analysis. It also, and this is problematic, exemplifies the intermingling of the personal and professional in writing, editing, publishing, and reviewing.

Compared to *Architecture*, *Walls of Fear* contains two more stories, about ninety more pages, representation by more outstanding writers, more fully developed editorial material, and less splatter horror. All these differences contribute toward making *Walls* a superior volume. Of the sixteen stories in *Walls*, eight are genuinely fine and one of these luminously gorgeous; the other eight stories entertain, certainly, reminding one of the Alfred Hitchcock paperback anthologies of horror I read in high school, but leaving no lasting echo of mood and meaning.

Let me speak of the eight stars, beginning with the most luminous. Gene Wolfe's "The Haunted Boardinghouse" is a story of the same sensibility and caliber of his "Detective of Dreams" (first collected in Kirby McCauley's *Dark Forces* [1980] and most recently in Wolfe's *Endangered Species* [1989]). Written in a neo-Victorian style, appropriate to the neo-Victorian world of its protagonist, "The Haunted Boardinghouse" employs Wolfe's most powerful recurring figure, the abandoned child, in an America of ancient futurity. A young scholar seeks a post as a librarian and finds it in a huge, Peakean boarding school, where he also finds death, love, and peace. Wolfe evokes the ache of chances missed, the excitement of the pursuit of knowledge, and the spiritual mystery of last things in a story enigmatic, emblematic, and touching: a most elevated interpretation of horror.

Jonathan Carroll, Susan Palwick, Sharon Baker, and Karl Edward Wagner contribute strong stories which juxtapose childhood with adult perceptions. Carroll's and Palwick's stories are made horrible by the chasm between children's and adults' understandings of mortality. Baker and Wagner deal with memory and wish fulfillment as they show us, by fantastic means, the difference between youth and age. Two other stories deal with a feminist issue, the connection between a woman and her home: Gwyneth Jones' "Grandmother's Footsteps" and M. J. English's "Penelope Comes Home." Garry Kilworth's "Inside the Walled City" successfully evokes claustrophobia in a story of a malevolent housing project. All these stories illustrate how real horror is a more complex and humane matter than the simple presentation of ick and atrocity. These eight remind us that cruelty and terror have meaning only when juxtaposed by kindness and serenity; what might have been and what could be with what is.

I found the remaining eight stories in the volume—by Jack Womack, James Morrow, Greg Cox, Chet Williamson, Edward Bryant, and Richard A. Lupoff—entertaining, sometimes artfully creepy, but there is more to horror than the *frisson*, as Kathryn Cramer's introduction tells us. That introduction, which also appeared in the August 1990 issue of this review in slightly different form, makes a number of thoughtful observations on the genre of horror. Cramer's essay blends the personal and the academic in a sometimes jarring way. She refers to ideas of Barnard Levi St. Armand, Julia Kristeva, Gyorgy Dociu, and M. C. Escher with clarity and succinctness. But she refers to her own experiences at an exhibit of Joel Peter Witkin's photographs and at a screening of *The Shining* with fewer of these admirable qualities, though probably with equal relevance.

Cramer's division of horror fiction into moral allegory, psychological metaphor, and nature-of-reality horror, and of literary architecture into literal architecture, explicit architectural meta-plot, and submerged architectural metaphor, seems both useful and, as she herself admits, "a

bit too pat." In fact, this section of the introduction is rather tangled and dry, and is followed by a somewhat rambling reminiscence which takes longer than it should to arrive at its provocative exploration of the value of aesthetic and moral limits. Cramer argues convincingly that limits provide "the edge of repression that allows the tale of terror to exist at all." Her essay is, then, insightful, much more stimulating than the usual introduction to a popular anthology, but also in need of editing to smooth the way between the personal and the professional.

The production of this volume, from its inception to my review, is also a blend of the personal and the professional. Such a blend is commonplace in the world I know, sf, and is probably just as common in the broader range of publishing as well. Morrow publishes *Walls*, David Hartwell works for Morrow, Kathryn Cramer is a friend of Hartwell's, Cramer, Hartwell, and Greg Cox (one of the authors in the volume) all work on the *NYRSP*. Cramer appears, judging by her comments in *Walls*, to be friends with three other writers represented

The New York Review of Science Fiction Readings at Dixon Place

Beginning September 19, Dixon Place will host a Fall series of speculative fiction readings presented by The New York Review of Science Fiction. On the third Wednesday of every month from September through December (second Wednesday of November), two writers will read from their works in the informal, comfortable atmosphere of Dixon Place. Readers will include many of the leading writers of imaginative fiction.

September 19

Jack Womack

Terry Bisson

October 17

Susan Palwick

Samuel R. Delany

November 14

Joan D. Vinge

Ellen Kushner

December 19

Michael Swanwick

James Morrow

READINGS ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT NOTICE.

Admission: \$4.98. Seating is limited.

Time: 8:00 p.m. (doors open at 7:30)

Refreshments are available.

For more information contact Ellie Cavan at (212) 673-6752 or Gordon Van Gelder at (212) 674-5151 x735

Dixon Place • 37 E. First St. (between First and Second Avenues) • New York, NY 10003

in the volume—Wolfe, Baker, and Kilworth. And am I, the reviewer, outside this Pynchon-esque web? Certainly not; I know Hartwell, have met Cramer, am friends with Wolfe and Baker. All these links raise at least three problems: to what extent do connections such as these offer unfair advantages for publishing opportunities? do published works suffer in quality because of these connections? and to what extent are reviews influenced by them? If we answer honestly, we must admit that

all three questions have inevitably unsatisfactory answers. If we keep those questions in mind, however, we can minimize their unsatisfactory impact, and limit the damage to quality and integrity. I have tried to do that in my review. What I believe to be the excellence of this anthology suggests that its editor has tried as well. ▲

Joan Gordon lives in Commack, New York.

The Weird Tale by S. T. Joshi

Austin, Texas: Univ. of Texas Press, 1990; \$27.50 hc, \$12.95 tp; 291 pages
reviewed by Richard Terra

Rather than a dry academic study, this curious little book seems more like an extended literary discussion among intelligent, interested readers. Joshi has done fine work in the past—particularly his critical studies and textual researches of the work of H. P. Lovecraft—and here his presentation is thoroughly professional and offers an intriguingly individual examination of that ill-defined region where the realms of fantasy, science fiction and horror share a common border. He states early on: "I have written this book principally because I enjoy most of these writers and wish others to enjoy them. Naïve as this sounds, I cannot imagine any other reason why anyone would want to write criticism."

The Weird Tale examines the work of six writers, all of them more or less acknowledged as central figures in the development of weird fiction: Arthur Machen, Lord Dunsany, Algernon Blackwood, M. R. James, Ambrose Bierce and H. P. Lovecraft. (It should be noted that three of the book's chapters—those dealing with Arthur Machen, Lord Dunsany, and M. R. James—are reprints of articles that have previously appeared elsewhere.)

The volume thus covers, roughly, a period of about 1880 to 1940, in an attempt to discern some of the roots of what is now called weird fiction, to explain why these writers created such tales.

Despite this aim, Joshi's book is not a formal study of the genre. As he states in the very first line of his preface: "This work did not begin as a theoretical study; indeed, it appears that I have gradually evolved toward a consciously antitheoretical position." Rather, his central organizing thesis derives from "a rather odd assertion: the weird tale, in the period covered . . . did not (and perhaps does not now) exist as a genre but as the *consequence of a world view* . . . If the weird tale exists now as a genre, it may only be because critics and publishers have deemed it so by fiat" (page 1; Joshi's italics).

Joshi thus makes no attempt to define just what makes a weird tale weird, though he does spend several pages in his introduction describing various categories into which many weird tales may, empirically, be assigned—tales of supernatural horror, ghost stories, quasi-science fiction, psychological horror and fantasy—and notes that the weird occasionally spills over into heroic fantasy and what he terms the "ambiguous horror tale" (à la "The Tum of the Screw"). He concludes:

In spite of the schematizations . . . it should not be assumed that I have now come to regard the weird tale as a genre with various subgenres. My final point is this: weird writers utilize the schemas I have outlined . . . *precisely in accordance with their philosophical predisposition* . . . I am convinced we can understand these writers' work—the whole of their work, not merely their purportedly "weird" writing—only by examining their metaphysical, ethical and aesthetic theories and then by seeing how their fiction reflects or expresses these theories (page 10).

Because Joshi does not attempt to fit the works of the writers under consideration into a predetermined critical theory of the genre, his book offers a somewhat different perspective, and lends a much-needed sense of balance to the critical discussion of weird fantasy as literature. In approaching these writers and their works by examining their worldviews and philosophical outlooks, he attempts to broaden the critical dimension beyond narrow genre boundaries and formal aca-

demic hair-splitting.

Joshi's contribution is not to be underestimated, despite the relative brevity of the book. As he himself states: "If I seem less than charitable to some previous commentators, it is frankly because I feel that much of the scholarship in this field has been totally misconceived . . . The fact is, of course, that most of the writers discussed here have received very negligible criticism." Joshi gives credit where credit is due in his very useful bibliography, but also notes that "the bulk of recent critical work (not merely in this field but in most others) seems so cheerless, mechanical, and obfuscatory that the reader is likely to be repelled rather than attracted to the subjects of study. I hope my work does not have an analogous effect." Joshi's candid attitude and his avowed desire to share his enjoyment of these writers, as well as his straightforward, stick-to-the-point prose, is refreshing.

His approach is clearly most successful in his chapter on Lord Dunsany. Despite the fact that Dunsany wrote prolifically until his death in 1957, both readers and critics have tended to focus their attention on his early imaginary world fantasies, most of which were written before 1925. Joshi notes: "Now all this is both unfortunate and unfair. It is unfortunate because some of Dunsany's later work . . . is very brilliant . . . ; it is unfair because it is foolish and unjust to expect an author to adhere to a single style and manner over a career of fifty years" (page 43). He rightly points out that serious criticism of Dunsany's writing is badly lacking because many critics "find his early work so flawless of its kind as to be virtually uncriticizable, and most have not considered the later works at all."

In fact, throughout *The Weird Tale* Joshi often spends more time throwing open new areas to later critical exploration than working toward any final, definitive conclusions. His chapters on Machen and Bierce are especially good.

The book does, however, have some drawbacks, and perhaps a few flaws. Joshi assumes a considerable degree of familiarity on the part of the reader with the authors considered and their works. He spends little or no space in plot or story synopses—at times an advantage, for it allows him to proceed immediately with his commentary, but at other a drawback if the reader has not read or cannot clearly recall the details of the story being discussed.

Also, since so much of the discussion is based on Joshi's own personal responses to these writers, he often omits detailed support for some of his opinions and assertions about their work, at times leaving the reader in the dark as to what path of reasoning or association he followed to arrive at his conclusion. In general Joshi provides notes only for direct quotes or in discussing the observations of other critics.

Perhaps the book's chief flaw is the inclusion of the chapter on M. R. James, who spent his fiction-writing career, seemingly, attempting to wring every conceivable change on the ghost story he could; James worked primarily in the first third of this century. Joshi clearly finds James' work uninspired and repetitious, and relatively unimportant; I am at a loss to say why he even bothered to include the chapter when, as he states at the end of this study, there are many other writers of the weird tale—some, such as William Hope Hodgson and Clark Ashton Smith, who also worked in the time period under consideration—who deserve greater study. But it's his book and he can rant if he chooses.

Other quirks seem equally rooted in personal preference. As an example, in discussing Algernon Blackwood's psychic detective, John Silence, Joshi states: "The combination of the horror tale and the

detective tale is about as grotesque an idea as can be imagined, especially for Blackwood" (page 115). And yet, when considering *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* in his chapter on Lovecraft, he is able to gush: "This novel is, quite simply, a detective story; it may be the greatest supernatural detective story ever written" (page 195).

Indeed, Joshi's entire chapter on Lovecraft is noticeably biased, though understandably so: Joshi has spent much time and energy on his studies and careful textual recreations of Lovecraft, and he is clearly playing favorite. This bias does lead him to perhaps inflate the importance of Lovecraft's intellectual and philosophical views somewhat, and he seems less ready to discuss the flaws in this author's work, but his discussion of the curious Providence recluse is on the whole

well-balanced and informative, and does make at least a preliminary attempt to cut back some of the overly-superficial critical undergrowth that has grown up around Lovecraft's legacy.

Overall, then, *The Weird Tale* is quite a good and useful work. It is a refreshingly readable and accessible scholarly study. Did later authors of weird fiction hold the sorts of viewpoints that lead these writers to pen such tales? Do they all? Joshi makes no attempt to address such questions; that is not his purpose. What he does demonstrate, and very well, is that we need to understand why these authors chose to write their weird tales before any sound theory of a genre can be developed.

Richard Terni lives in Seattle, Washington.

Lavondys by Robert Holdstock

New York: William Morrow 1990. \$18.95; hc; 367 pages

reviewed by Cy Chauvin

Lavondys is the sequel to *Mythago Wood*, one of the best fantasy novels of the past decade, which, like *Little, Big*, expanded its category, and won the World Fantasy Award for doing so. It is not necessary to have read *Mythago Wood* first to love reading *Lavondys*, although you may prefer to do so, since *Mythago Wood* has more cohesion and drive than its sequel.

Lavondys begins rather well, with a young girl named Tallis Keeton growing up in the countryside around Rhyhope Wood in England during the mid-1940s and early 50s. The imagery of the masks she makes (illustrated as chapter headings by Alan Lee), inspired by the denizens of this wood, are wonderful, building just the right sort of feeling and mood. She is inspired by a book of folk tales her grandfather has left her, with his own eccentric annotations, and creates her own magic rituals, which the masks are part of. Every field, brook, and large tree must have its own special name. The portion of the novel where she creates a "hollowing," a doorway into the past, and sees a young man dying on a battlefield, is especially stunning. Robert Holdstock has always had an interest in the ancient tribes and peoples of the British Isles, which he has displayed since his first stories and novels, and whether all the details of Tallis's rituals (or the many other rituals and legends used later in the novel) are invented or taken from history they are very interesting and convincing.

But this novel is much more a collection of incidents than *Mythago Wood*, and even has several tales set in it that Tallis tells Mr. Williams while in a trance (and Mr. Williams is not without his own hints of mystery). And when Tallis enters the heart of the Wood in Part II, the narrative push of the novel really begins to fade. The search for *Lavondys* ("The place of endless hunt and constant fear . . . The underworld") and Tallis's brother Harry, who is lost in the Wood, are the characters' stated goals, but this seems to have little effect on the progress of the novel.

Eight years are passed over from Part I to Part II, the eight years immediately after Tallis enters the Wood with Scathach, the man she saw in her vision dying on the battlefield, and with whom she has fallen in love. Besides being the period during which she first adjusts to life in the Wood, these are also the years in which she changes from girl to woman, and has several miscarriages and a baby that has died, all mentioned in retrospect. These would seem to be important years that are passed over, even though this is a much longer novel than the first one.

A minor character in *Mythago Wood*, Wynne Jones—a scientist who went into the Wood and found himself trapped there—becomes important in Part II. He is Scathach's father, and discusses with Tallis how the Wood works, taking myths and archetypes from the unconscious minds of those who enter it and creating them into living forms. Each person who enters it brings with them new myths. These explanations are presented in the form of lectures, and tend to be of the pseudoscience kind, e.g. "grimoires, archetypal landscapes generated by the primordial energies of the inherited unconscious," while skirting entirely the question of how archetypes are given a physical presence, or why. Is this a biological survival mechanism adopted by a species of trees?

Actually, I would have been content with no explanations. Lectures are not the best way to present this material. Readers often prefer to be simply plunged into an unknown world and discover the rationale for events as they go along. Part of the pleasure of fantasy is uncovering its meaning; as Joanna Russ says, the best novels do not have detachable ideas. Or am I simply being fooled into believing that books I do not immediately understand are more profound?

Cy Chauvin edited *The Tale That Wags the God* by James Blish (*Advent*, 1988).

Greg Cox

Excerpt from *The Transylvanian Library: A Consumer's Guide to Vampire Fiction*

JAMES, M.R.

"Count Magnus" (1904: 14 pp.)

"An Episode of Cathedral History" (1919: 17 pp.)

In these cosy, antiquarian tales of horror, told by one of the genre's most venerable practitioners, the word "vampire" is never used, nor do we ever get more than a glimpse of whatever's skulking about. At this point, though, I fully expect you to be able to spot an obvious vampire at a distance.

That distance in "Count Magnus" is measured in years, as the plot is pieced together from the moldering notes of an English traveller who spent too much time poking around the tomb of an infamous Swedish noble. (Swedish?) Eventually, the sarcophagus opens and a mysterious cloaked figure pursues the unlucky Mr. Whaxall to his death.

Another vampire count? Probably, though the precise manner of

Whaxall's demise is unclear.

"Episode" is less ambiguous, and almost as exciting as its title. . . . Renovations at an old English church uncover a hidden tomb. Almost immediately thereafter, the neighboring village is haunted by a strange, nocturnal apparition: a wailing shadow with fiery red eyes—and a fondness for children and old folks. These, the weakest of the community, start dying off, until the nameless creeper is laid to rest by a quiet, discreet, and rather embarrassed exorcism conducted by the local minister. It takes a few casualties, apparently, to get some people to admit there's a problem.

Both of James's excursions into vampirism come to us in the form of an old-fashioned ghost story, recalled in comfortable circumstances several years later. One can easily imagine hearing them in front of a warm fire one night, and dozing off halfway through.



QUIROGA, HORACIO
"The Feather Pillow" (1907; 4 pp.)

The Zoological Vampire returns in this short-but-nasty story of a young bride succumbing to a mysterious "anemia." Not until after the unfortunate Alicia's death does anyone think to inspect the pillow on which she nightly slept, in which resided "a monstrous creature, a living, viscous ball . . . so swollen one could scarcely make out its mouth."

Ik!

See also: ROBINSON

variation on the Standard Early Vampire Story (see: LORING). As in "The Last Lords of Gardnel," though, the vampires starts out as a guiltless victim—which gives the old tale a certain poignancy.



VIERECK, GEORGE SYLVESTER

The House of the Vampire (New York: Moffat, Yard & Co., 1907; 200 pp.)

Oddly enough, the first full-length vampire novel since *Dracula* bears very little resemblance to Bram Stoker. Indeed, it reads more like second-rate Oscar Wilde. . . .

House is a study in psychic vampirism, set in the world of arts and literature. Ernest Fielding, the sensitive, poetic hero, falls under the spell of the charismatic Reginald Clarke, Clarke is a celebrated writer, the self-proclaimed Shakespeare of his time, but he's not much of a monitor; all of his eager young protégés quickly fade into obscurity. Too late, Fielding discovers that the Great Man is in fact a telepathic plagiarist, stealing the creations (and creativity) of dozens of unknown artists. Nor is Clarke terribly reluctant about any of this. In the end, he justifies his vampirism in the name of Art. Better one new Shakespeare than a flood of individual talents working separately. . . .

An interesting idea, an interesting villain, but an understandably obscure book. Our artistic hero is a bit on the insipid side, and the reader must wade through much pompous rhapsodizing about Truth and Beauty before getting to the chills at the end.

Of historical interest mostly.

BENSON, E.P.

BLACKWOOD, ALGERNON

"The Singular Death of Morton" (UK: *The Trans*, 1910; 7 pp.)
"The Transfer" (1912; 11 pp.)

Blackwood's first vampire story is as predictable as it is "singular." Two travellers, wandering through an isolated European valley, encounter a pale young woman in an old, abandoned inn. Later, the survivor learns that the girl had died fifty years before, accused of vampirism.

"The Room in the Tower" (1912; 18 pp.)
"Mrs. Amworth" (1920; 20 pp.)

"The Transfer" (which is not about the perils of crosstown commuting) is more memorable. There's a psychic vampire, yes, of the "Lucilla Müller" variety, but the story extends the phenomenon to include a patch of barren, inanimate earth. Mr. Frene, the human vamp, innocently drains vitality from everyone he meets, but loses it all when he steps upon the hungry ground. Frene dies on the spot, which subsequently grows green and lush.

This single weird incident is observed by the young female narrator, who instinctively knows what's about to happen, but can't quite summon up the confidence to intervene. Not much of a plot really, but Blackwood gives it a sense of creepy inevitability, not to mention the idea that even the earth might be vampiric.

Benson, a prolific writer of classic ghost stories, used basically the same plotline as the Standard Early Vampire Story; but never without adding some new and unsettling twist. His two vampire tales follow the traditional pattern, but he knew better than to expect the old, clichéd terrors to carry the story.

CRAWFORD, FRANCIS MARION

"For the Blood is the Life" (1911)

A murdered gypsy girl returns to feed on her lover, only to perish in a memorably gory staking. This story enjoys a good reputation and has been widely reprinted, but really all we have here is yet another

variation on the Standard Early Vampire Story (see: LORING). As in "The Last Lords of Gardnel," though, the vampires starts out as a guiltless victim—which gives the old tale a certain poignancy.

At the end of "The Room in the Tower," the grave of a suicide is dug up and her coffin found filled with blood. Very predictable. Prior to that, however, the reader has been placed in the uncomfortable (but intriguing) position of a man who, years after the fact, finds himself acting out in real life a recurrent childhood nightmare. The narrator has never visited the Tower Room before, but he knows it the minute he sees it, just as he experiences again a sense of hidden danger.

Deja vu mixes strangely with vampirism here, but the connection is never really explained.

Even better is "Mrs. Amworth," which brings an Undead demon all the way from India to a quiet English village. Young people waste away, and the inevitable old occultist starts sharpening his stake, but what is really neat is the unheeded disguise the culprit assumes.

Mrs. Amworth is neither sinister like Varney, nor exotic as Clarimonde. Instead, she appears merely a genial, outgoing middle-aged widow who likes to spend her evenings playing bridge with the neighbors—until everyone is asleep, that is. Then she levitates through the night air in search of open windows and dreaming victims.

At first, she can even move about physically during the day, until a freak traffic accident ends her mortal existence, but not her nocturnal prowlings. And all along, she remains the last person anyone would ever suspect of being a vampire.

That's what makes this story so effective. Benson moved the vampire out of the mouldering mansion and into the house next door. Nobody would do this better until *Salem's Lot*, fifty-five years later. See KING, STEPHEN.

Note: Benson later wrote two more stories of marginally vampiric content, "Negotium Perambulans" (1923) and "And No Bird Sings" (1926). Both stories feature a worm-like "elemental" that nonetheless feeds on human blood.



ASKEW, ALICE and CLAUDE

"Aylmer Vance and the Vampire" (*Weekly Tale-Teller*, 1914; 16 pp.)

Another occult investigator (see: HERON) runs across the Undead, this time in Blackwark Castle, Scotland. The Holmesian detective comes to the aid of a young bride possessed by the fierce spirit of a vampire ancestress. Vance's formidable willpower drives the ghost away just in time (i.e. before the bridegroom is drained completely), and even manages to convince the guilt-ridden heroine that she is innocent of evil herself.

A rare instance, in other words, of temporary vampirism. Lucy Westerna should have been so lucky.



DAUBENY, ULRIC

"The Sunatch" (*The Elemental: Tales of the Supernormal and the Inexplicable*, 1919; 10 pp.)

"How red that Sunatch is!"

Yes, this horrified character is indeed referring to a tree, an

insidious tree that grows ever redder as first one, then another English-woman wastes away with anemia. Despite nightmares and pains in the throat, the beautiful victims are drawn to sit in the branches of the trees—which is ultimately revealed to have grown from a stake driven into the grave of a long-dead vampire. In the end, the confused hero finally takes decisive action: tearing down the tree and growing garlic in its place.

Not a bad idea, that.

Unlike "The Man-Eating Tree" and "The Flowering of the Strange Orchid," this is a true tale of the *negrofawn*, albeit more original than most. More than that, "The Sunrach" is the scariest and most effective story about a Botanical Vampire yet written. (For more humorous treatments of the theme, see "Enigma" and *The Cemetery Walkers at Midnight*.) The bite of the garden-creature's wooden "teeth" is enough to make one wince, imagining slivers in the jugular, and the grisly plot still lingers in my mind. Good god, if even our stakes turn against us, what next?



DOYLE, SIR ARTHUR CONAN

"The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire" (UK: *The Strand*, January 1924: 16 pp.)

"Rubbish, Watson, rubbish! What have we to do with walking corpses who can only be held in their graves by stakes driven through their hearts? It's pure lunacy."

Unlike Aylmer Vance and his many ghost-hunting colleagues, Mr. Sherlock Holmes of Baker Street obviously has little patience with supernatural explanations. Instead, he has so little interest in vampires that he is obliged to look up the definition when called upon to investigate a case of apparent vampirism in the outskirts of London.

Granted, Holmes's skepticism is entirely justified where the Sussex Vampire is concerned. It takes Holmes only the better part of an afternoon to clear the name of the accused *negrofawn*, an exotic beauty from far-off Peru, and pin the blame on a clever poisoner elsewhere in the household. An innocent woman is spared "The Fate of Madame Cabanel" (see: LINTON) and Holmes is allowed to bask in the vindication of his reasoning . . . for now.

Pity Sherlock. The Sussex Vampire was only the beginning of his involvement with the Undead, and subsequent adventures, written by authors other than his creator, would introduce him to "walking corpses" much less easily disposed of. See also: ESTLEMAN, GEAR/ CORBY, SABERHAGEN, and even the continuing comic book series, SCARLET IN GLORY.

"The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire" was later included as part of *The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes*.



LOVECRAFT, H.P.

"The Hound" (*Weird Tales*, February 1924: 10 pp.)

The creator of Cthulhu, the Dunwich Horror, and the Colour Out of Space was not known for his vampire stories. To the contrary, Lovecraft revolutionized horror fiction by discarding the clichés and conventions of Gothic superstition in favor of a universe's worth of alien nightmares beyond the understanding of science, sanity, or Judeo-Christian philosophy. Still, even Lovecraft wasn't able to make it through his entire career without falling back on, at least once, a tried-and-true creature of Hell:

"For crouched within that century-old coffin, embraced by a close-packed nightmare retinue of high, sinewy, sleeping bats, was the bony thing my friend and I had robbed; not clean and placid as we had seen it then, but covered with caked blood and shreds of alien flesh and hair, and leering sentiently at me with phosphorescent sockets and sharp envenomated fangs yawning twistedly in mockery of my inevitable doom."

The story itself is a cautionary tale about the dangers of digging up a sorcerer's tomb, and of the narrator's hopeless flight from a giant winged watchdog. Not a lot like *Dracula*, perhaps, but I think the image

above speaks for itself. A coffin, bats, fangs, blood.

"The Hound" originally appeared in the classic pulp magazine *Weird Tales*, as did many of the stories to follow. From about 1923 to 1955, the best place to look for vampire fiction was in *Weird Tales*, the first magazine that published only tales of an uncthulhu nature. See also: BLOCH, BRADBURY, DERLETH, HOWARD, MATTHESON (RICHARD), MOORE, SMITH, WELLMAN, and undoubtedly several more.



ROMAN, VICTOR

"Four Wooden Stakes" (*Weird Tales*, February 1925: 17 pp.)

A family is nearly destroyed by a vampiric ancestor, originally bitten by a bat in South America. Basically, just another variation on the Standard Early Vampire Story (see: LORING), but with a few uncharacteristic touches. The male and quite unsexy Undead has more in common with the transformed grandfather in "The Family of the Vouldak" than the vampires in, say, "The Blood is the Life" or "The Tomb of Sarah." Even more intriguing is the direct link the story establishes between supernatural vampirism and the real-life vampire bats of the New World. Bats and vampires may have flown together from *Dracula* on (see also: LOVECRAFT, WATSON), but Roman seems to be pointing an accusing finger at one particular species. No wonder they're an Endangered Species these days!



DERLETH, AUGUST

"Bat's Belfry" (*Weird Tales*, May 1926: 12 pp.)

"The Drifting Snow" (*Weird Tales*, February 1939: 13 pp.)

Derleth, who sometimes wrote under the name of Stephen Gran- don, was both an ardent disciple of H.P. Lovecraft and an indefatigable writer/editor/publisher of supernatural fiction over the next several decades. Like so many others, he first made his mark in *Weird Tales*. . .

In "Bat's Belfry," an amateur occultist moves into the abandoned mansion of the late Baronet Lohrville. Unlike less knowledgeable heroes, he knows there are vampires about (how else to account for those strange nightmares? this sudden bloodloss?), but the sneaky suckers prove impossible to locate. In desperation, he resorts to an incantation found in the "Book of Thoth," one used to summon the Undead. Alas, he forgets to set up his protective circle. . .

The vampires in "Bat's Belfry" are dead-ringers for Dracula and his brides, and overall the sorcerous twist at the end hardly justifies all the overly-familiar claptrap that goes on before.



"The Drifting Snow," written over a decade later, is a much more haunting story. Set in the Wisconsin woods, it concerns a family that is slowly being destroyed by a growing band of "snow vampires." These frosty revenants appear every few years to lure another victim away from the warmth and safety of the family house. Although their victims die of frostbite rather than fangbite, they inevitably rise from their graves in true vampire fashion. And, like more traditional *negrofawn*, the snow vampires are ultimately laid to rest by means of a long-delayed mass staking.

There are few surprises here, but the mood is effectively ominous and foreboding. See also: TOLSTOY.



Derleth also wrote at least two other vampire stories which I was unable to locate: "Nellie Foster" (1933), concerning a Midwestern vampire, and "Whom Shall I Say is Calling?" (1952), about vampires at a costume party. I would not be surprised if there were more.



Screed

(Letters of Comment)

David Rike, Crockett, California

So how do you abbreviate yourselves? I mean like . . . JWC, ASF, vV, Amz, RAP, etc. Having read *NYR* of Books before you came along, I figured NYRSF would do. Then I read in a fanzine . . . rather, a small *apazine* . . . someone referring to as *NY-Sci-Fi*. This is in an apa where the collated sheets of the zines are stapled together and called a "disty." Frankly, it sounds like a LA-area baby-talk to me. How do you do it?

I like Greg Cox's listing and annotations. More! Will he then do it for Frankensteinian creatures, from Shelley through Karen Copek, etc.? And, after all of the other permutations, "Cutie Small Funny Creatures In SF, Fantasy & Sci. Fi. Media?" May we live so long!

But . . . that rainy summer was in 1816. Frankenstein was published in 1818. The literary world's most famous 'one-shot' session. They even made a movie out of it. Gothic, dir. Ken Russell, UK, 1986, I bet they went to Switzerland to get away from all of those fat fans who were forever Regency dancing there in London.

[We abbreviate ourselves as "NYRSF," pronounced, according to a colleague of Susan Palwick's "nurseef," rhymes with UNICEF.—KC]

Brian Stableford, Reading, England

Greg Cox's *Consumer's Guide to Vampire Fiction* (issue no. 23) includes a story variously known as "Wake Not the Dead!" and "The Bride of the Grave," which he attributes (as most other sources do) to Ludwig Tieck. I once tried to track down the German original of this story but could find no trace of it in Tieck's collected works and no reference to it in any book on Tieck. I mentioned this failure to Ev Bieler who said that he had earlier conducted a similar search with the same result, and that he had profound doubts about the authenticity of the attribution. I would be most interested to know if any of your readers can clarify the question of whether the story really is a translation from the German, and—if so—when and where the original version appeared.

E. M. Kemp Pedersen, Copenhagen, Denmark

A couple of comments on Alexei Panarin's "Short Stories," NYRSF for August. I don't find ultra-shorts particularly tough to do, I enjoy writing them. Having been asked to do it both by word count (one hundred) and number of sentences (three), I discovered a difference that looks deceptively similar to the one between prose and poetry: 100 words for the Drabble Project had the economy of prose (100 words by 100 writers at 100 shillings, from Beacon Publications) whereas 3 sentences for *Focus: For SF Writers*, BSFA's writer's magazine, provoked the precise vision and (particularly) the meaning-load of poetry. Art became most important in the drabble, vision in the piece in *Focus*. Which may have to do with mere length, or the method of counting (it is only for British and American editors that writers count words), or the fact that the editor of *Focus*, Cecil Nurse, suggested a theme. In both types, the single word masters, makes its own little sense, if you wish (some of us don't: novelists avowedly wince at the thought).

How short can it get and remain a narration? A lot of confusion has been generated by questions of the type, "What are the necessary constituents of a story?" A story does not have constituents. It has a narrator with a position and a direction. Storytellers know, and there is no reason to let theorists confuse them. Theory is a sign of ignorance, as Ronald Sukenick has said in a wonderfully controlled piece of Insolence in *New Literary History*. (The narrator's autonomy, and the strategic distance between author and narrator is the main point of the poetic I am working on, the first part of which is a poetic translation forthcoming in *Studies in the Humanities*.)

The zeitgeist suggests that we read narrative into everything, so attempts to stretch the definitions of narrative should be approached with some caution, but Alexei's offering is so to the bone that it is easy to draw the line.

Starting from the end:

1. Oneness is a concept, courtesy of God.

2. The end is an ideology, courtesy of Us. Both go out, but with 3. "The sleeper woke" things begin to happen because there is a verb representing action. What's more, there is an object of narration, and a genuine *nouveau* that. We want more of the same, which is another tempting but probably false definition of narration.

The top two present other problems again because in this culture we know what these statements are. Formally, they might have been narratives although their verbs are not action ones.

4. "Be," and it was" is first of all a demonstration of speech act on the level where that unit is real in one of our major, textual correlates. Some of us think it is the true story of Us. "The world as text" is lurking behind, so I don't entirely trust it.

5. "I think, therefore I am" has precondition no. 1, a narrator. The original producer might have proceeded to tell a tale the way Kierkegaard did. Instead he argued, while posturing in living with the possible circularity of the statement and with the realization that his "I" is the philosophical one, the archi-I which can be given a position in a statement, whereas the narrator-I is the one who can will a statement.

My suggestion:

1. Waking, (that is an intended comma, not a misprint)
2. She listened.
3. A bell rang.
4. Entering, her team-mates screamed.
5. She was covered in hairs.

If they are joined together, though, my guess is that an editor would be more likely to accept them under the rubric of a poem.

Kenneth L. Houghton, New York, New York

Understanding that "some of my best friends are . . .", congratulations on noting that Clarion as such "discourages experimentation," but is only a six-week workshop and therefore not necessarily responsible for a writer's entire career. That many—although certainly not all—Clarion graduates sound like AA members when they speak about The Workshop may or may not be relevant, but certainly hasn't helped the image. I have no intrinsic objection to the goals of the organization (AA); I recognize that not everyone can stop drinking by themselves the way, say, Don Newcombe did. But I crossed paths with AA/AlAnon/ACOA people for almost three years, and was told on more than one occasion that non-AA people "just cannot understand" their membership, as if standards of proper human behavior should be different because some people once gave in to their demons and others didn't (or have other demons, or didn't blame their parents for everything or . . .).

Similarly, Clarion people repeatedly attack the rest of the world because they comment on Clarion without having been there. (Knight in NYRSF: "Why are people who have never been to Clarion invariably convinced they know all about it?" Shepard in SF Eye: "I remain curious as to why Richard Grant . . . has chosen to malign something of which he has no experience . . .") Personally, I doubt that spending about \$2500 and six weeks in East Lansing or Seattle (or New Orleans or Clarion, PA) makes the people who come out of the workshop that incomprehensible to the rest of the world. As Mr. Shepard (and, in other words, Ms. Cramer and Mr. Van Gelder) noted, "Clarion is a workshop, nothing more." It doesn't make the person who writes "trilogies featuring Dark Lords and cute little buggers whose swords have names" any more worthy of reading, except maybe in a bifurcated reality where Clarion is Clarion and non-Clarion is The Other and ne'er the twain shall meet.

And that would be silly. While the image of Greg Cox and Kathryn Cramer and Tony Daniel and Lisa Tuttle and John Shirley and Susan Palwick and Lucius Shepard and Vonda McIntyre all joined at the (ir) hip(s) may be amusing, it isn't real. It would be nice if everyone considered Clarion the same way we took "Miss Budrys"—as a metaphor (or maybe metonym); I regrettably forget the

difference). Not that Clarion is or ever has been perfect; Harlan Ellison raised some objections to the cliquishness and self-satisfaction of some of the attendees in his articles in *Clarion II* and *Clarion III* (which were first published in June 1972 and October 1973, respectively)—objections which Mr. Shepard also raises in his 1990 *SF Eye* article. Maybe Clarion should do some repairs on its own house (a shelter here, a window there) so that it won't be so usable as the Straw Man to begin an aesthetic argument.

(Semi-rhetorical question: Why isn't anyone defending A. J. in this one? Do we accept the metaphor/ronym of "Miss Budrys" but not "Clarion Credo" because the latter is cliché while the former works with the Dianetics people and doesn't review for Asimov's? Or does everyone but Damon Knight and myself have a copy of Richard Grant's ninth-grade English report card, which really was signed by a Miss Budrys?)

Personally, I took Mr. Grant's article to be more of an aesthetic statement than an attack on Clarion, or even the *F & SF* reviewing staff. Let the battle rage—and see either of Michael G. Adkisson's two articles (as well as Mr. Grant's) in *New Pathways* #16 (July 1990); these guys aren't just playing for a six-week workshop, and spending massive efforts defending Clarion may be just misdirected firepower.

David E. Myers, Seattle, Washington

I liked your comments in the forum as well. Even though every year, everyone tells the students to experiment and take chances, most aim for the more psychologically comfortable goal of getting a positive critique (which isn't all bad, since they must write well to do so). Some, on the other hand, write some really bizarre stuff. But after Clarion, most will aim for getting published, which means (usually) keeping it safe and non-experimental. That doesn't mean that Clarion has clipped the wings of birds that otherwise would have soared, and now can only sing a pretty song from their cages. The cage door is left open. They can fly out and crap all over the Scarecrow.

Richard Gilliam, Clearwater, Florida

Paul Williams distorts by concealment with his assertion that Chuck Berry's legal woes were "trumped-up charges" and "his real crime was being black and successful." While agreeing that Berry's Mann Act conviction was both prejudiced and unjust, and more importantly agreeing with Williams' insightful comments on Berry's importance to the development of rock and roll, before Williams enshrines Saint Chuck in the Hall of Martyrs to Racism, Berry's own culpability needs to be addressed.

I'll disregard Berry's frequent minor run-ins with police and concentrate on the three separate occasions on which he served time in prison.

The first occurrence came in Berry's late teens, when, as he admits in his eponymous autobiography, he was involved in a series of armed robberies, finally being caught and convicted for hijacking a car. Berry complains in the autobiography about the severity of his sentence. It seems to me he was fortunate to be tried as a juvenile. He served three years (1944-1947) and was released on his twenty-first birthday.

The second was the white slavery conviction Williams refers to. True, as Williams says, there was no coercion, but Williams overlooks that the "victim" in the case was a fourteen-year-old prostitute Berry had brought from Texas to Missouri, ostensibly, to work as a night club hostess. After Berry fired the girl she went to the police. Berry's defense at the trial contended, in part, that the girl was prostitute before he met her and therefore he had not been responsible for her corruption. For this Berry served slightly under two years in 1962 and 1963. During the same period, Berry was acquitted on another Mann Act charge involving a different woman.

The third was Berry's conviction for Federal Income Tax evasion. He served 100 days during 1979 at a minimum security prison.

Berry is currently under indictment on drug charges involving the possession of some serious quantities. He may well go to jail for a fourth time.

Williams is correct about the racist application of the Mann Act.

It's a very bad piece of law and, sadly, is still on the books. Black musicians were (and still are) at the forefront of the increasing acceptance of blacks into the mainstream of American society and there is no doubt Chuck Berry has had to fight racism throughout his career. Nonetheless, Berry's first legal problems came long before his success as a musician and can hardly be attributed to "railroading." The re-widening of racial inequalities is a significant problem as we enter the nineties, but fifty years ago white people regularly went to jail for armed robbery.

I saw Chuck Berry in concert approximately twenty-years ago. (Stevie Wonder was his opening act.) Berry was outstanding, entertaining with the rhythms which had revolutionized popular music in the fifties. This is how he should be considered—by the substance of his works. And while I agree that the environment within which a work is created is a valid issue for consideration, once the topic is raised it deserves a more thorough discussion than Williams gave it in this particular essay.

[We won't publishing further letters on music. If you write, we'll forward the letter, if appropriate, or merely read it and enjoy it. We've enjoyed the Williams pieces (and the responses), but don't want to expand further on the subject at the expense of column inches devoted to it. —DGH]

Nicholas Ruddick, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada

Many thanks for the copies of *NYRSF* #25 containing the review of my Priest book and *The Quiet Woman*.

I finished the Reader's Guide to Priest in 1986—the long delay in its appearance was entirely Starmont's fault. Though I could take issue with some of his points, in general I think Mr. Keller was fair and his assessment of *The Quiet Woman* corresponds pretty much with my own.

I have to mention one thing about the comment about my Concluding Note: it was deliberately intended to "unravel a job already neatly tied up," because it strikes me that Priest's work does its very best to evade neat critical summation, and this is one reason why we should value it. (He makes the same sort of point at the end of his review of *CW*.)

Thank you, anyway, for your careful and thorough review.

Soldier of Worldcon

continued from page 24

We made many new friends and will support foreign worldcons henceforth, because we are convinced that science fiction belongs to the world, and not just the English-speaking world. Enthusiasm for the liberating optimism of science fiction characterized this year's worldcon and it was refreshing and energizing.

We are sorry to have missed ConDiego, but it was, we are told, just another big American con. And there are too many of those to go to now, too few at which energetic enthusiasm for science fiction is much in evidence. We want to congratulate the fans from the U.S. who attended and helped vote in a foreign worldcon. Do it again. There are going to be frequent opportunities in the future. We all need the cultural ferment and conflict, the challenge of other intellectual systems and social experiences to keep our literature vital.

Nothing could have made it more apparent that we live in a new world this year than the lively Eastern Europeans at worldcon, who are founding new fan clubs, new magazines, writing new stories and translating ours. They want sfbdly and value it highly. They know the world can change radically and suddenly, and they're ready to work at it. Their high spirits were infectious. You'd like them. They're living in a new world and they make you think about your own in new ways. They don't have much money, like most fans everywhere, but they're going to get by one way or another, if they have to make it themselves. They're that interested.

Don't be a Soldier of Worldcon! Charlie Brown has been promoting worldwide sf in *Loops* for years, as has Andy Porter in *SF Chronicle*. Better listen now. The walls are down. Don't keep them up in your mind. Otherwise the joke is on you and you won't remember the punchline in the morning.

—David Hartwell, Kathryn Cramer & the editors.

The New York Review of Science Fiction 23

Soldier of Worldcon

Plane fares and exchange rates being what they are, Kathryn Cramer and David Hartwell are the only staff members who made it to the Worldcon in the Hague. Kathryn's parents, John and Pauline Cramer, had arrived several days earlier, and so John picked us up—Kathryn, David, and Susan Frotter, our ebullient agent—at Schipol Airport in Amsterdam.

The Cramers had reservations on the shore in the Hotel Ormo, duly pronounced "oh no." John explained, "We tried to get into the Badhotel, but they were all booked up." Jay Haldeman, who did manage to get into the Badhotel said, with a grin, "We're saving the stationery!"

While the convention itself was being held in the Congresgebouw—a great, sterile convention center where, at one meal, Kathryn was served, much to the mortification of the waitress, food with live worms in it—the center of late night Worldcon action was the lobby of the Kurhaus, the granddaddy of the Hague's beach-front hotels. The Kurhaus was built in the late nineteenth century as a grand beach resort. The lobby has a high ceiling with a huge skylight (the Dutch are very good at skylights, it seems) surrounded by murals, à la the Sistine Chapel, of maidens having a good time.

Like the maidens of the ceiling, after the convention program was over for the day, after dinner, after all the parties had closed, after the bars had closed, we gathered in the Kurhaus bar and had a good time. Some of those in attendance were Russell and Jenny Blackford and Janeen Webb, of *Australian Science Fiction Review*, Lech Jezzmyk and Dorota Malinowska, both of *Nova Fantastyka*—the newly privatized version of the Polish magazine *Fantastyka*—Peter Nicholls, and many others.

One of the things one does late at night at a convention when one has just met a group of new people is tell old jokes. At Sercon, last January, Kathryn came up with the idea for a collaboration between Samuel R. Delany and Gene Wolfe, a book that would be both the next book in Wolfe's *Soldier* series and the next book in Delany's *Neveryldin* series. *Soldier of Neveryldin* would be a fantasy novel about a man who has extraordinary sexual experiences every day which he cannot remember in the morning unless he has written them down before going to sleep. It followed naturally in the conversation, then, that *Soldier of Worldcon* must be about someone who goes to the worldcon and wakes up each morning unable to remember what happened the previous night, but equipped with a piece of paper upon which many room numbers are scrawled, giving a now meaningless itinerary for the previous evening.

We, however, do remember where we were and what we did. This year, the World Science Fiction Convention was held in The Hague. The U.S. Ambassador, an admirer of science fiction, gave a credible keynote speech at the Hugo ceremony. Many languages were spoken in the halls and bars. Eastern Europeans attended in significant number, for the first time ever. The Japanese gave their traditional gracious party. Americans did not outnumber everyone else. Costumes were scarce. The program was well-attended, though no better organized than usual.

(continued on page 23)

Bulk Rate
U. S. Postage
Paid
Pleasantville, NY
Permit No. 32

The New York Review of Science Fiction
P. O. Box 78, Pleasantville, NY 10570